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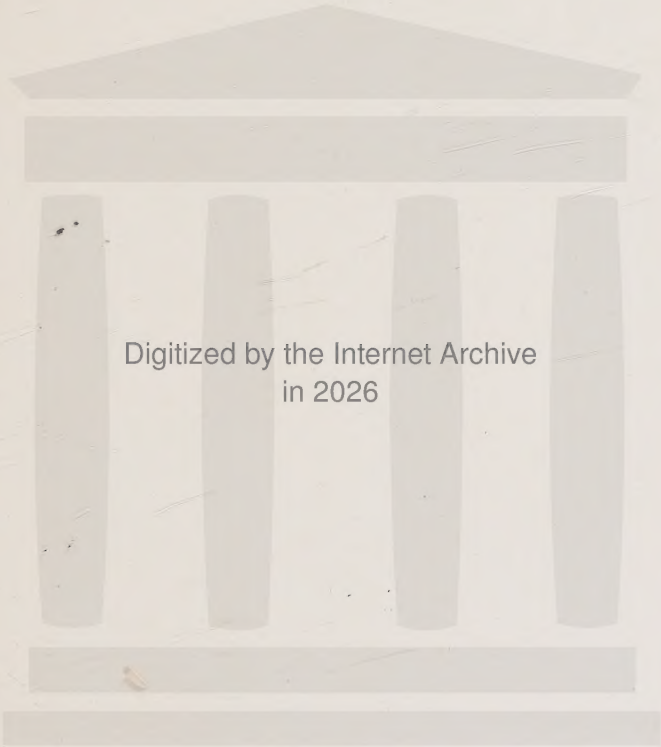
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"'I DON'T WANT TO BE JUST AN OLD MAID SISTER IN SOMEBODY ELSE'S HOME.'" (*See page* 34.)

Mary Ware's Promised Land

By ANNIE FELLOWS JOHNSTON

Author of "The Little Colonel Series," "Big Brother," "Ole Mammy's Torment," "Joel: A Boy of Galilee," "Asa Holmes," "Travelers Five on Life's Highway," etc.

Illustrated by JOHN GOSS

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TO

MISS FANNY CRAIG

THE "MISS ALLISON" OF THESE STORIES,
WHOSE "ROAD OF THE LOVING HEART" RUNS WIDE AND FAR
THROUGH ALL THIS HAPPY VALLEY

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PART I

MARY WARE'S PROMISED LAND

PART I

CHAPTER I

A SEEKER OF NEW TRAILS

When the Ware family boarded the train in San Antonio that September morning for their long journey back to Lone-Rock, every passenger on the Pullman straightened up with an appearance of interest. Somehow their arrival had the effect of a breath of fresh air blowing through the stuffy car. Even before their entrance some curiosity had been awakened by remarks which floated in from the rear platform, where they were bidding farewell to some friends who had come to see them off.

"Do write and tell us what your next adventures are, Mary," exclaimed one clear voice. "Your family ought to be named Gulliver instead of Ware,

for you are always travelling around to such queer, out-of-the-way places. I suppose you haven't the faintest idea where you'll be six months from now."

"No, nor where I'll be in even six weeks," came the answer, in a laughing girlish treble. "As I told the Mallory twins when we left Bauer, I'm like 'Gray Brother' now, snuffing at the dawn wind and asking where shall we lair to-day. From now I follow new trails. And, girls, I wish you could have heard Brud's mournful little voice piping after me down the track, as the train pulled out, 'Good hunting, Miss Mayry! Good hunting!'"

"Oh, you'll have that, no matter where you go," was the confident answer. "And don't forget to write and tell us about it."

A chorus of good-byes and farewell injunctions followed this seeker of new trails into the car, and the passengers glanced up to find that she was a bright, happy-looking girl in her teens. She carried a sheaf of roses on one arm, and some new magazines under the other. One noticed first the alertness of the face under the stylish hat with its bronze quills, and then the girlish simplicity of dress and manner which showed at a glance that she was a thorough little gentlewoman. Her

mother, who followed, gave the same impression; gray-gowned, gray-gloved, bearing a parting gift of sweet violets, all that she could carry, in both hands.

One literal minded woman who had overheard Mary's remarks about lairs and new trails, and who had been on the watch for something wild all across the state of Texas, looked up in disappointment. There was nothing whatever in their appearance to suggest that they had lived in queer places or that they were on their way to one now. The fifteen year old boy who followed them was like any other big boy in short trousers, and the young man who brought up the rear and was undeniably good to look at, gave not the slightest evidence of being on a quest for adventure. The only reason the woman could see for the name of Gulliver being applied to the family, was that they settled themselves with the ease and dispatch of old travellers.

While Jack was hanging up his mother's coat, and Norman storing their suit-cases away in one section, Mary, in the seat across the aisle, was pressing her face against the window-pane, watching for a parting glimpse of the friends, when they should pass through the station gate. A sudden tapping on the glass outside startled her, and the

next instant she was exclaiming excitedly to her elder brother, "Oh, quick, Jack! Put up the window, please. It's Gay and Roberta! They're still waiting out there!"

As the window flew up, and Mary's head was thrust out, passengers on that side of the car saw two young girls standing on tiptoe to speak to her. The one with beautiful auburn hair called out breathlessly, "Oh, Mary! Bogey's coming! Pray that the train will stand one more minute!" And the other, the one with curly lashes and mischievous mouth, chimed in, "He's bringing an enormous box of candy! Mean thing, to come so late that we can't have even a nibble!"

Then those looking out saw a young fellow in lieutenant's uniform sprint through the gate, down the long station and across half a dozen tracks to reach the place where Roberta and Gay stood like excited guide-posts, wildly pointing out the window, and beckoning him to hurry. Red-faced and panting, he brought up beside them with a hasty salute, just as the wheels began turning and the long train started to puff slowly out of the station. There was only time to thrust the box through the window and hastily clasp the little gloved hand held out to him.

"THERE WAS ONLY TIME TO . . . HASTILY CLASP THE LITTLE GLOVED HAND HELD OUT TO HIM."

"Say good-bye to the others for me," he called, trotting along beside the moving train. "Sorry I was late. I had a lot of things to tell you. I'll have to write them."

"Do," called Mary, "and let me know —" But he was no longer in hearing distance and the sentence was left unfinished.

When she drew in her head there was a deeper color in her face and such shining pleasure in her eyes, that every fellow traveller who had seen the little byplay, knew just what delight the lieutenant's parting attention had given her. More than one watched furtively with a sort of inward smiling as she opened the box and passed it around for the family to share and admire.

One person, especially, found entertainment in watching her. He was the elderly, spectacled gentleman in the section behind her. He was an illustrator for a well-known publishing house, and Mary would have counted her adventures well begun, could she have known who was sitting behind her, and that one of his famous cover designs was on the very magazine which lay open on her lap. Well for her peace of mind that she did not know what he proceeded to do soon after her arrival. Producing a pencil and drawing pad from

his satchel, he made a quick sketch of her, as she sat sideways in her seat, carrying on an animated conversation with Jack.

The artist smiled as he sketched in the jaunty quills of the hat, perked at just the right angle to make an effective picture. He was sure that they gave the key-note to her character.

"They have such an effect of alertness and 'go,'" was his inward comment. "It's sensible of her to know that this style gives her distinction, while those big floppy affairs everybody wears nowadays would have made just an ordinary looking girl of her."

He would have been still more positive that the hat gave the key-note of her character, if he had seen the perseverance and ingenuity that had gone towards its making. For she had been her own milliner. Two other hats had been ripped to pieces to give her material for this, and the stylish brown quills which had first attracted his attention, had been saved from the big bronze turkey which had been sent to them from the Barnaby ranch for their Christmas dinner.

Before he had made more than an outline, the porter came by with a paper bag, and Mary whisked her hat off her head and into the bag, serenely un-

conscious that thereby she was arresting the development of a good picture.

Later, when Jack changed to the seat facing Mary, and with his elbow on the window ledge and chin propped on his fist sat watching the flying landscape, the illustrator made a sketch of him also. This time he did not stop with a bare outline. What had seemed just a boyish face at first glance, invited his careful study. Those mature lines about the mouth, the firm set of the lips, the serious depths of the grave gray eyes, certainly belonged to one who had known responsibilities and struggles, and, in some way, he felt, conquest. He wondered what there had been in the young fellow's life to leave such a record. The longer he studied the face the better he liked it.

The whole family seemed unusually well worth knowing, he concluded after a critical survey of Norman and his mother, who sat in the opposite section, entertaining each other with such evident interest that it made him long for some one to talk to himself. Tired by his two days' journey and bored by the monotony of his surroundings, he yawned, stretched himself, and rising, sauntered out to the rear platform of the observation car. Here, some time later, Norman found him smoking

and was drawn into conversation with the stranger, who seemed to have a gift for asking questions.

The conversation was confined principally to the different kinds of wild animals and snakes to be found in the state of Texas, and to an amateur "zoo" which Norman had once owned in Lone-Rock, the mining camp in Arizona that they were now going back to. But incidentally the interested artist learned that Jack had been assistant manager of the mines. That accounted for the mature lines of his face. They stood for responsibilities bravely shouldered. He had been almost killed by an accident which would have crushed several Mexican workmen had he not risked his own life for theirs. He had been ordered to a milder climate, hence their recent sojourn in Texas. They had supposed he would always be a helpless cripple, but, by an almost miraculous operation, he had been restored, and was now going back to take his old position.

Norman himself intended to be a mining engineer, he told the stranger when questioned. He had already begun to take a practical course under the chief at the office. Mathematics came easy to him. The other studies, which he thought un-

necessary, but which his family insisted upon, he recited to the minister. He, and another boy, Billy Downs. There were only a few white boys of his age in Lone-Rock.

"What does your sister do for entertainment?" asked his questioner, recalling the vivacious little face under the hat with the saucy bronze quills. "Doesn't she find it rather lonely there?"

"Why, no!" answered Norman in a surprised tone. "A place just naturally quits being lonesome when Mary gets into it, and she does so many things that nobody can ever guess what she's going to think of doing next."

Probably it was because he had a daughter of his own, who, not possessing Mary's rare gift, demanded constant amusement from her family, that he turned his spectacled gaze on her with deepened interest when he went back into the car, and many times during the rest of the time that they journeyed together. She crossed the aisle to sit with her mother the greater part of the afternoon, so he heard nothing of the conversation which appeared to be of absorbing interest to them both.

But the woman who had been on the watch for something wild all the way across the state, deliberately arranged to hear as much of it as she could.

A scrap or two that reached her above the noise of the train made her prick up her ears. She changed her seat so that she sat back to back with Mrs. Ware and Mary. Eavesdropping on the train was perfectly justifiable, she told her uneasy conscience, because there was no personal element in it. Of course she couldn't do it at home, but it was different among strangers. All the world was a stage when one travelled, and the people one met on a journey were the actors one naturally looked to to help pass the time. So she sat with her eyes closed, because riding backward always made her dizzy, and her head so close to the back of Mary's that the bronze quills would have touched her ear had Mary turned an inch or two farther around in her seat.

Presently she gathered that this interesting young girl was about to go out into the wide, wide world to make her fortune, and that she had a list of teachers' agencies and employment bureaus to which she intended applying as soon as she reached home. From various magazines given her to read on the way, she had cut a number of advertisements which she wanted to answer, but her mother objected to most of them. She did not want her to take a place among strangers as governess, com-

panion, social secretary, mother's helper, reader for a clipping bureau or shopping agent.

"You are too young, Mary," she insisted. "One never knows what one is getting into in strange families. Now, that position in a Girls' Winter Camp in Florida does not seem so objectionable, because they give teachers at Warwick Hall as reference. You can easily find out all about it. But there is no real reason why you should go away this winter. Now that Jack has his position again and we are all well and strong we can live like lords at Lone-Rock on his salary. At least," she added, smiling, "it must seem like lords to some of the families in the camp. And he can save a little each month besides."

"But, mother dear," answered Mary, a distressed frown puckering her smooth forehead. "I don't want to settle down for Jack to take care of me. I want to live my own life — to see something of the world. You let Joyce go without objecting."

"Yes, to make an artist of herself. But somehow that was different. She had a definite career mapped out. Her work is the very breath of life to her, and it would have been wrong to hold her when she has such undoubted talent. But you see,

Mary, your goal is so vague. You haven't any great object in view. You're willing to do almost anything for the sake of change. I verily believe you'd like to try each one of those positions in turn, just for the novelty of the experiences, and the opportunity of meeting all those different kinds of people."

Mary nodded emphatically. "Oh, I would! I'd love it!" Then she laughed at her mother's puzzled expression.

"You can't understand it, can you? Your whole brood is turning out to be the kind that pines to be 'in the swim' for itself. Still, you didn't cluck distractedly when Joyce went to New York and Holland into the Navy, and you followed Jack up here when he struck out for himself, and you know Norman's chosen work is liable to take him anywhere on the face of the globe. So I don't see why you should cluck at me when I edge off after the others."

Mrs. Ware smiled into the merry eyes waiting for their answer. "I'm not trying to stop you entirely," she replied. "I'm only warning you to go slowly and to be very careful. As long as there is nothing especial you have set your heart on accomplishing, it seems unwise to snatch at the first

chance that offers. You're very young yet, remember, only eighteen."

Mary made no answer for several minutes. Down in her heart was the feeling that some day her life would mean far more to the world than Joyce's career as an artist or Holland's as a naval officer. She had felt so ever since that first day at Warwick Hall, when she gazed up at the great window of Edryn's tryst, where his coat of arms gleamed like jewels in its amber setting. As she had listened to the flood of wonderful music rolling up from below, something out of it had begun calling her. And it had gone on calling and calling with the compelling note of a far-off yet insistent trumpet, into a world of nameless longings and exalted ambitions, of burning desire to do great deeds. And finally she had begun to understand that somewhere, some day, some great achievement awaited her. Like Edryn she had heard the King's call, and like him she had whispered his answer softly and reverently as before an altar:

> "Oh list!
> Oh heart and hand of mine, keep tryst —
> Keep tryst or die!"

It was still all vague and shadowy. With what great duty to the universe she was to keep tryst

she did not yet know, and it was now two years since she had heard that call. But the vision still stayed. Inwardly she knew she was some sort of a Joan of Arc, consecrated to some high destiny. Yet when she thought of explaining anything so intangible, she began to smile at the thought of how ridiculous such an explanation would sound, shouted out in broad daylight, above the roar of the train. Such confidences can be given only in twilight and cloisters, just as the call itself can come only to those who "wake at dawn to listen in high places."

But feeling presently that she must give some definite reason to her mother for wanting to start out to seek her fortunes, she leaned across the aisle and slipped a railroad folder from Jack's coat pocket. It had a map on one side of it, and spreading it across both her lap and her mother's, she laid her finger on a spot within the boundary lines of Kentucky.

"Don't you remember my little primary geography?" she asked. "The one I began to study at Lee's ranch? I had a gilt paper star pasted right there over Lloydsboro Valley, and a red ink line running to it from Arizona. I remember the day I put them there, I told Hazel Lee that there

was my 'Promised Land,' and that I'd vowed a vow to go there some day if the heavens fell. I'll never forget the horror on her little freckled face as she answered, 'Aw, ain't you wicked! I bet you never get there now, just for saying that!'

"But I *did* get there!" she continued with deep satisfaction. "And now I've made up my mind to go back there to live some of these days. You see, mamma, my visit there was like the trial trip that Caleb and Joshua made to 'spy out the land.' Don't you remember the picture in Grandmother Ware's Bible of the two men coming back with such an enormous bunch of grapes on a pole between them that they could hardly carry it? It proved that the fruits of Canaan were better and bigger than the fruits of any other country. That was what my visit did; proved that I could be better and happier in Lloydsboro Valley than anywhere else in the world."

There was a moment's silence, then she added wistfully, "Somehow, when you're there, it seems easier to keep 'the compass needle of your soul true to the North-star of a great ambition.' There's so much to inspire one there. I have a feeling that if I could only go back to live, I'd — Oh, I hardly know how to express it! But it would prove to

be my 'high place,' the place where I'll hear my call. So the great reason why I want to start right away to earn money is that I may have enough as soon as possible to buy a home back there. That's my dearest day-dream, and I'm bound to make it come true if I have to wander around in the wilderness of hard work as long as the old Israelites did in theirs. You're to come with me. That's one of the best parts of my dream, for I know how you've always loved the place and longed to go back. Now, don't you think that's an object good enough and big enough to let me go for?"

Mrs. Ware seized the little hand spread out over the map of Kentucky and gave it an impulsive squeeze.

"Yes," she answered. "If you're ever as homesick for the dear old place as I used to be sometimes, I can understand your longing to go back there to live."

"*Used* to be!" echoed Mary blankly, staring at her in astonishment. "Aren't you now? Wouldn't you be glad to go back there to spend the rest of your days? I don't mean right now, of course, while Jack and Norman need you so much here, but" — lowering her voice — "I'm just as sure as I can be without having been told officially that

Jack is going to marry Betty Lewis as soon as his finances are in better shape. She's such a perfect darling that they'd be happy ever after, and then I wouldn't have any compunctions about taking you away from him. Now that's another reason I don't want to stay on here, just to be an added expense to him."

The words poured out so impetuously, the face turned toward her was so eager, that Mrs. Ware could not dim its light by answering the first two questions as she felt impelled. She answered the last instead, saying that she felt as Mary did about Jack's marriage, and that it made her inexpressibly happy to think that the girl he might some day bring home as his bride was the daughter of her dear old friend and schoolmate, Joyce Allen.

They lowered their voices over this confidence, so that the woman who was sitting back to back with them shifted her position and leaned a little nearer. Even then she could not hear what they were saying till Mary returned to her first question.

"'But, mamma, you said '*used* to be.' Do you really mean that you don't care for your Happy Valley as much as you used to? The place you've talked about to us since we were babies, till we've come to think of it as enchanted ground?"

Feeling as if she were pleading guilty to a charge of high treason, Mrs. Ware answered slowly, "No, I can't truthfully say that I do long for it as I used to. It's this way, little daughter," she added hastily, seeing the disappointment that shadowed Mary's face. "I've been away such a very, very long time, that there are only a few of my girlhood friends left. Betty's mother has been dead many years. The Little Colonel's mother is really the only one I could expect to find unchanged. The old seminary is burned down, strangers are in the homes I used to visit, and I'm afraid I'd find so many changes that it would be as sad as visiting a cemetery. And I've lived so long in the West, that I've taken root here now. I think of it as home. I'm just as interested as Jack is in building up the fortunes of our new state. I think he is going to be a power in it some day. If I should live long enough, it would not surprise me in the least to see him Governor of it some time."

She folded one little gray-gloved hand over the other so complacently as she calmly made this announcement, that Mary laughed and shook her head despairingly.

"Oh, mamma! mamma! You vain woman! What fine swans all your ducklings are going to

turn out to be! Jack a Governor, Holland an Admiral, Norman a mighty man of valor (variety still undetermined), and Joyce a celebrity in the world of art! Must I be the only Simple Simon in the bunch? What would you really like to have me do? Now, own up, if you could have your choice, what is your ambition for me?"

"Well," confessed Mrs. Ware, "you're such a born home-maker, that I'd like to see you that before all else. I believe you could make a home so much better than your neighbors, that like the creator of the proverbial mouse-trap, you would have the world making a beaten track to your door, even though you lived in the woods. As the old Colonel once said, you can be an honor to your sex and one of the most interesting women of your generation."

Although she spoke jokingly there was such a note of belief in her voice that Mary caught her by the arm and shook it, saying playfully, "Peacock! If *that's* what you hope for me, then you must certainly speed my parting. It's only in the goodly land of Lloydsboro that I can measure up to all you expect of me. I'll try and fill the bill, but promise me this much. When I've finally pitched my tent in Canaan and achieved that happy home, then you'll come and share it with me. At

least," she added as Mrs. Ware nodded assent, "what time you are not strutting through foreign salons or the Governor's mansion, or sailing the high seas with the Admiral."

The woman behind them heard no more, for Jack called them across the aisle to look at something from his window, and when they returned to their seats Mrs. Ware picked up a magazine and Mary began an absorbing study of the map. She retraced the line of her first railroad journey, the pilgrimage from the little village of Plainsville, Kansas, to Phœnix, Arizona. As she thought of it, she could almost feel the lump in her throat that had risen when she looked back for the last time on the little brown house they were leaving forever, and waved good-bye to the lonesome little Christmas tree they had put out on the porch for the birds.

It was on that trip that her tireless tongue had made life-long friends of two strangers whom she talked to: Phil Tremont, and his sister Elsie. Her brothers had always teased her about her chatterbox ways, but suppose she *hadn't* talked to them that day. The endless chain of happenings that that friendship started never would have begun, and life would have been far different for all of them.

Then her finger traced the way to where Ware's Wigwam would have been on the map if it had been a spot large enough to mark. There Phil had come into their life again, almost like one of the family. Her real acquaintance with the Princess Winsome of her dreams began there too, when Lloyd Sherman made her memorable visit, and Mary, with the adoring admiration of a little girl for the older one whom she takes as her ideal in all things, began to copy her in every way possible.

The next line followed the course of the red ink trail in her old primary geography, for that was the trail she had followed back to the gilt paper star which stood for Lloydsboro Valley. The land which she had learned to love through song and story had been the dearest of all to her ever since, through the associations of that happy summer. There were several other trips to retrace as she sat with the map spread out before her. The long one she took to Warwick Hall, where surely no one ever had fuller, happier school-days. She did not stop to recall them now, thinking with satisfaction that they were all recorded in her "Good Times Book," and that if ever "days of dole, those hoar-frost seasons of the soul," came into her life, every cell of that memory hive would be stored with the

honey of their good cheer. So also were her Christmas and Easter vacations recorded, when she and Betty visited Joyce in her studio apartment in New York.

The next line which she traced was a hasty dash back across the map to Lone-Rock. She always tried to dash the thought of it out of mind just as quickly. The heart-breaking agony of it, when she was flying home to find her brother a hopeless cripple, was too terrible to recall even now, after long time, when he was sitting beside her, strong and well.

Then her finger trailed down across the map, retracing their last journey the year before to San Antonio and the hill country above it. In many ways it had been a hard year, but, remembering its happy outcome, she said to herself that it should be marked by triple lines of red. They had gone down to the place, strangers in a strange land, they were coming away with some of the warmest friendships of their lives binding them fast to it. Down there Jack had had his wonderful recovery, which was above and beyond all that their wildest hopes had pictured. And, too, it was the last place where she would have expected to meet Phil Tremont again. Yet he had appeared suddenly one day as

if it were the most natural thing in the world to be standing there by the huisache tree to help her over the fence of the blue-bonnet pasture.

"By what has been, learn what will be," she repeated, and then idly pricked that motto into the edge of the folder with a pin, as she went on recalling various incidents. Judging by her past she had every reason to believe that the future might be full of happy surprises; so, as she studied the map now, it was to wonder which way the new trails would lead her.

"Any way at all!" she thought fervently. "I don't care which direction they take, if they'll only come around to the Happy Valley. I'm bound to get there at any cost."

Presently she folded up the map and sat gazing dreamily out of the window. An old song that was often on her lips came to her mind, but, this time, she parodied it to suit her hopes:

"For if I go not by the road, and go not by the hill,
And go not by the far sea way, yet go I surely will!
Close all the roads of all the world — Love's road is open still."

CHAPTER II

BACK AT LONE-ROCK

THE home-coming was keenly pleasant. Mary, who had been going over the house helping to throw open all the doors and windows, paused in the cheerful living-room. The September sun shone across the worn carpet and the familiar furniture which had served them even in the days of the little brown house.

"I didn't know that I *could* be so glad to get back to these old tables and chairs," she exclaimed. "It actually gives you a real thrill to be welcomed by something that's known you since babyhood, doesn't it?"

"Yes," answered Jack. "They've been considerably mixed up with our family history, and bear more of the scars of our battles than we do. That little chair of Joyce's for instance. Back in the days of my kilts and curls I used to kick dents in it every time we had a scrap, because I couldn't fight a girl, and I had to let off steam some way."

"This is my especial friend," said Mary. She dropped into a wide rocker that held out welcoming arms. "Holland and I used to play in this by the hour. It's a wonder there's anything left of it. We had it for a stage-coach so many times, and turned over in it whenever it was attacked by the Indians. I used to curl up in it before the fire, to read or dream or cry in it, till it knows me in all my moods and tenses. Some of these days, when I go to live in my old Kentucky home, I shall ask mamma to let me take it with me just for old times' sake."

Jack opened the door of the clock and began winding the weights that had hung idle for nearly a year. When the swinging pendulum once more began its deep-toned tick-tock, he looked back over his shoulder with a smile.

"Now I feel that I'm really at home when I hear that voice. As far back as I can remember it's always been saying, 'All *right!* All *right!*' I made the nurse carry it back into the kitchen where I couldn't hear it the day the doctor told me I could never walk again. Its cheerfulness nearly drove me wild when I knew that everything was so hopelessly all wrong. But now listen!" he insisted exultantly. "Everything *is* all right now, and

every day is Thanksgiving Day to me the year around."

There was a huskiness in his voice as he added, "Nobody can know what it means to me — the blessedness of being able to go to work."

He dashed away to the office soon after to discover what had been done in his long absence. Norman hurried through the tasks assigned to him as soon as possible, impatient to be off to explore old haunts with Billy Downs. Two pairs of quick, capable hands made light work of the cleaning and unpacking that had to be done that day, and accomplished much more that might have been left till another time had not Mary's usual zeal for getting everything in proper place in the least possible time taken possession of her.

"Oh, yes, I know, mamma," she called back in answer to a protest from the next room. "These curtains *could* wait till to-morrow, but they are all fresh and ready to hang, and I'll sleep better if they are on their poles instead of on my mind."

As she climbed up and down the step-ladder her thoughts were not on the curtains which she adjusted mechanically, nor on the song which she was humming in the same way. She was composing the letter which she intended sending to the Girls'

"'I'LL SLEEP BETTER IF THEY ARE ON THEIR POLES INSTEAD OF ON MY MIND.'"

Winter Camp in Florida, applying for the vacant position, and she wanted to make it perfect of its kind. Mrs. Ware, watching the zest with which she fell upon her work of beautifying the little cottage, thought it must be because she felt the truth of the refrain which she sang softly over and over:

> "'Mid pleasures and palaces, tho' we may roam,
> Be it ever so humble, there's no place like home."

She was so glad to be back herself, that presently, when she had occasion to go through the room again, she joined in for a few notes in passing.

The sweet alto voice made Mary suddenly aware of what she was singing, and she gave a guilty little start, glad that her mother could not know that her thoughts had all been absorbed in planning to get away from the home she was singing about so fondly.

"It does seem nicer to be back than I thought it would," she admitted to herself. "But maybe that's because I know I don't have to stay. Even the finest cage in the world is more attractive with its door open than shut."

Although she did not realize the fact, much of her hurry to get the house in order was due to a feeling that the summons to take advantage of that

open door might come very soon, and she wanted to be ready when it came.

Late that afternoon she started to the post-office with two letters, one to the principal of the Girls' Camp, the other to the teacher in Warwick Hall who had been given as reference.

"Oh, I hope my application will get there in time, and I hope my references will be satisfactory," she thought earnestly. "They ought to be impressed, with a list which begins with Bishop Chartley and Madam, and General Walton's wife, and includes twenty people from New York to Fort Sam Houston in Texas."

Just then a wagon, bearing a huge load of hay, creaked slowly along the road past her, and a half forgotten superstition of her childhood flashed into her mind. Hazel Lee had told her once that if you make a wish on a hay-wagon it will come true if "yes" is the first word you say after doing so. But should you be asked a question requiring any other answer, or should it be necessary to make a remark not beginning with the magic yes, you'll "lose your wish."

So it was with a smile at the old foolishness that Mary watched the loaded wagon go lumbering by. She had wished for a speedy and favorable reply

to the letter she was about to post. It had been a point of honor with Hazel and herself whenever the other came running up, significantly tapping mute lips with an impatient forefinger, to ask, "Do you love candy?" or "Do you like peaches?" recognizing the necessity of some question to which the liberated little tongue could respond with a fervent yes. Boys were always so mean about it, asking, "Do you want me to pull your hair?" or "Do you love Peter Finn?" a half-witted boy in the neighborhood.

The childish rite brought up a little of the old thrill of apprehension, that no one might ask her the proper question to make her wish come true, and Mary smiled broadly over her own foolishness as she went on up the street. It was the only street which Lone-Rock boasted; just a straggling road, beginning down by the railroad station and the mine offices, and ending farther up the mountain in a narrow wagon track. The houses of the white families were scattered along it at uneven intervals for the space of half a mile. Then one came to a little wooden school-house on one side, and on the other the tiny box of a room which served as a post-office. The school-house was used as a chapel one day out of the week. The mining company's

store was beyond that, and a little farther along, the colony of shanties where the Mexican workmen and their families lived.

The fact that Mary had met no one since leaving home and that only the hay-wagon had passed her, emphasized the loneliness of the little hamlet and made her glad that she need not look forward to spending a winter there. Her quick eyes noted a few changes, however, which promised interesting things. Five new houses had gone up in their absence. There was a piano in one of them, Billy Downs had told Norman, and Mr. Moredock, the man in the new yellow house, who had come for his health, was writing a history of some kind, and had brought a whole wagon-load of books.

The postmaster would know all about the newcomers, Mary reflected with satisfaction. One of her pleasures of coming back was meeting her old friend, the postmaster, and at thought of him she walked a little faster. Captain Doane had held the office ever since Lone-Rock had been a mail station, and in a way was a sort of father confessor to everybody in the place. A clean-shaven jolly old face with deep laughter wrinkles about the blue eyes, which twinkled through steel-bowed spectacles, bushy iron-gray hair and bristling eyebrows —

that was about all one saw through the bars of the narrow delivery window. But so much kindly sympathy and neighborly interest and good advice and real concern were handed out with the daily mail, that every man in the community regarded him as his personal friend.

There were only two mail trains a day in Lone-Rock, and at this hour Mary was sure of finding him at leisure. Seeing him through the open window, sound asleep in his arm-chair over an open newspaper, with his spectacles slipping down his nose, Mary was about to spring in the door with a playful "boo." But she remembered her wish on the hay-wagon and the necessity of waiting for him to speak first. So she only rattled the latch. He started up, a little bewildered from his sudden awakening, but seeing who had come, dashed off the old slouch hat, perched on the back of his head.

"Well, bless my soul!" he cried heartily, coming forward with an outstretched hand. "If it isn't our little Mary Ware! I heard you were back and I've been looking all afternoon for you to drop in. Have you come back to stay, this time?"

There was an instant of hesitation, as she considered how she could reply to such a question honestly with a yes. Then she stammered, "Y-yes,

for a little while. That is, just for a few weeks." Then she drew a long breath. "My! That was a narrow escape. I've been wondering all the way up the street what would be the first thing you'd say to me, and for a second I was afraid you'd ruined my chances."

Her laugh rang out merrily at his bewildered exclamation. "The chances for my wish coming true," she explained. "I made one on a hay-wagon, coming along, about this letter."

"Sit down and give an account of yourself," he insisted, and as she had come for a visit she willingly obeyed. But she would not take his chair at the desk as he urged, climbing instead to the only other seat which the office afforded. It was a high stool beside the shelf where pens, ink and money-order blanks awaited the needs of the public. Mary had often occupied it, and from this perch had given the Captain some of the most amusing hours of his life.

He had missed her when she went away to school, and he never handed out the letters to her family postmarked "Warwick Hall" without a vision of the friendly little girl swinging her feet from her seat on this high stool, as she told him amazing tales of Ware's Wigwam and a place somewhere

off in Kentucky that she seemed to regard as a cross between the Land of Beulah and the Garden of Eden. When she came back from Warwick Hall she no longer dangled her feet, but sat in more grown-up fashion, her toes propped on the round below. And she seldom stayed long. There was too much to be done at home, with Jack needing such constant attention. But her short accounts of boarding-school life were like glimpses into a strange world, and he carried home all she told to repeat to his wife; for in an out-of-the-way corner of the universe, where little happens, the most trivial things are accounted of vital interest.

Now he had many questions to ask about Jack's recovery. It was a matter of household rejoicing in Lone-Rock that he had come back able to take his old place among them. Mary satisfied his curiosity and gave a brief outline of their doings while away, but she had questions of her own to ask. How was Aunt Sally Doane? The Captain's wife was "Aunt Sally" by courtesy to the entire settlement. Was her rheumatism better, and was the old red rooster still alive? Was it true that Mr. Moredock was an author, and how many young people had the new families brought with them?

But all roads led to the Rome of her heart's desire, and between her questions and the Captain's she kept jumping back, grasshopper-like, to the subject uppermost in her mind. His cordial interest, unlike her family's half-hearted consenting, led her into further confidences.

"Jack wants me to wait awhile and study at home until he can afford to send me back to Warwick Hall, but I might be in my twenties before that time, and the girls in my classes would be so much younger that they'd look upon me as a hoary old patriarch. Of course I'd be better equipped for what I hope to do eventually, but it would give me such a late start, and there are a number of things that I am fitted to do right now. Besides, it would handicap Jack to spend so much on me. It's only natural to expect that he'll want to marry and settle down some of these days, and he might not be able to do it as soon as he otherwise would if he had me to support and keep at college. And, Captain Doane, I don't want to be just an old maid sister in somebody else's home, even if it is the home of the dearest brother in the world."

The Captain threw back his head and laughed until the steel-bowed spectacles slid down his nose again.

"Much danger of your being an old maid sister in anybody's home, in a place like this where pretty girls are scarcer than hens' teeth," he declared, teasingly. "I know a likely young lad this minute who'd gladly save you from that fate. He's been around several times lately, inquiring when you might be expected back."

Mary was nearly consumed with curiosity to ask who the likely lad was, but only shrugged her shoulders incredulously, knowing that that would be the surest way of provoking him to a disclosure.

"Well, he *has!*" insisted the Captain. "It's young Upham, if you must know."

Mary's brows drew together in a vain effort to recall him, and she shook her head. "Upham? Upham? I never heard of him."

"Yes, yes, you have," insisted the Captain. "He drove a lumber wagon for the company summer before last. But he's been to school in Tucson all the time you've been away, and has just come back."

"Oh, you mean *Pink* Upham!" exclaimed Mary, suddenly enlightened, with an emphasis which seemed to say, "Oh, *that* boy! He doesn't count."

The Captain interpreted the emphasis and resented it.

"Just let me tell you, little Miss Disdain, he's a lad not to be sneezed at. He's come back the likeliest young man in all these parts."

Again Mary shrugged her shoulders and smiled unbelievingly. Her recollection of Pink Upham was of a big red-faced fellow overgrown and awkward, with a disgusting habit of twisting every one's remarks into puns, and of uttering trite truths with the air of just having discovered them. The warning whirr of a clock about to strike made her spring down from the stool with an exclamation of surprise.

"I had no idea I was staying so long. I've an errand at the store too, so I'll have to hurry."

"Well, I'll see that your letter gets started all right," he assured her. "You can't expect an answer before ten days at the earliest, can you?"

She turned back from the door and stood, considering. "I had counted it at about that, but I didn't think — if they wait to hear from the people I've referred them to, especially those farthest away, it might be double that time. That would keep me waiting clear into October. And then suppose somebody were ahead of me, and I shouldn't get the place, there'd be all that time lost. It would be

tragic to have the little ship I'd waited for so long, drift in a wreck."

"That's why I always hold that it's best to send out more than one," said the Captain. "Launch a whole fleet of 'em, is my advice. What makes life a tragedy for most people is that they put all their hopes on just one thing. They load all they've got on one vessel and then strain their eyes for a lifetime waiting for it to come back with all their hopes realized. But if they'd divide their interests and affections around a bit, and start them off in different directions, there'd never be a danger of total wreck. If one went down, there'd be some other cargo to look forward to."

It was a pet subject of the old man's, and Mary made haste to ward off his usual monologue by saying, "I'll certainly take your advice, Captain Doane. You'll see me down here to-morrow with a whole harbor full of little ships. I'll launch all the applications that my family will allow."

The figure of speech pleased her, and as she walked on to the store a vision of blue sea rose before her. On it she seemed to see a fleet of little boats with white sails swelling in the wind. On each sail was a letter and all together they spelled "Great Expectations."

"It's funny," thought Mary, "how such a picture popped right up in front of me. Now, if Joyce had such a fancy she'd do something with it. It would suggest a title design or a tail piece of some kind. Oh, why wasn't I born with a talent for writing! My head is just full of things sometimes that would make the loveliest stories, but when I try to put them on paper it's like trying to touch the rainbows on a bubble. The touch makes them vanish instantly."

It was some crash towelling that she was to call for at the store.

When she opened the door, the place seemed deserted, but she picked her way, among barrels and boxes, saddles and hams, to the dry-goods department in the rear. Through the open back door she could see two men in the yard, one repairing a chicken-coop, and the other standing with his hands in his pockets, watching the job. The man with the hammer and saw, she knew. He was the manager of the store. The other was a new clerk, who had been installed in her absence. She glanced at him curiously, for one reason because every newcomer counted for so much in the social life of the place, for another because he was so imposingly large. "Even taller than Phil

Tremont," she thought, and Phil was her standard of all that a man should measure up to in every way.

Presently, seeing that the chicken-coop would occupy their attention indefinitely unless she made some sign, she tapped on the floor with her heel. It was the new clerk who turned, and taking his hands out of his pockets, strode in to wait on her. She noticed that he had to stoop as he came through the doorway. Then she almost forgot what it was she had come to buy, in her surprise. For it was Pink Upham who rushed up to greet her, still red-faced and awkward and facetious, but such a different Pink that she could understand why the Captain had spoken of him as Pinckney, instead of by his undignified nickname. The year at college had done him good.

While he measured off the crash she was taking his measure with quick, critical glances. It was not his pale, straw-colored hair she objected to, made to look even paler by the contrast of his florid complexion and red four-in-hand with its turquoise scarf-pin. It was the way he combed his hair that she criticized, and the gaudy tie and the combination of colors. But his cordial greeting softened her critical glances somewhat. He was genuinely

glad to see her, and it was flattering to be welcomed so heartily.

That night at the supper table she recounted her adventures. "I met Pink Upham at the store to-day, Jack. How old do you suppose he is?"

"Oh, about twenty-one. Why?"

"Well, I scarcely knew him before we went away, and he called me by my first name as pat as you may please, and I didn't like it. And when he rolled up the towelling he crooked his little finger in such an affected, genteel, Miss Prim sort of way that it made his big fat hands look ridiculous. I don't know exactly what it was about him that irritated me so, but I couldn't bear him. And yet it seemed that he was so near being nice, that he could be awfully likable if he wasn't so self-conscious and queer."

"He's all right," answered Jack. "Pink is a good-hearted fellow, with the best intentions in the world, but he's green. You see, he hasn't any sisters to call him down and make fun of his mannerisms and set him straight on his color schemes and such things. Now, a girl in his position could get her bearings by going the rounds of the Home Magazines and Ladies' Companions, reading all the

Aunt Jenny Corners and columns of advice to anxious correspondents. But there are not so many fountains of information and inspiration for a young man."

"Now, there's your mission in life, Mary," spoke up Norman. "You are strong on giving advice and setting people straight. If you could only get some magazine to take you on for a column of that kind, you might accomplish a world of good. You could send marked copies to Pink, and it might be the making of him."

Norman expected his teasing remarks to meet with an amusing outburst, and was surprised when she pretended to take his suggestion seriously. Her eyes shone with the interest it awakened.

"Say! I'd like that," she answered emphatically. "I really would. I'd call it Uncle Jerry's Corner, and I'd certainly enjoy making up the letters myself so that I could have good spicy replies for my correspondents."

Norman, just in the act of drinking, almost choked on the laugh which seized him. "Excuse me," he spluttered, putting the glass down hastily, "but Mary in the role of Uncle Jerry is too funny. Why, Sis, you couldn't be a proper Uncle Jerry without chin whiskers. The editors wouldn't give

such a column to anybody without them. A *girl* could never fill a position like that."

"Indeed she could," Mary protested. "I knew a girl at school who earned her entire spending money for a year, one vacation, by writing an Aunt Ruth's Column for the weekly paper in her home town. She was only eighteen, and the most harum-scarum creature you ever saw. She had been engaged four times, and once to two boys at the same time. And she used to lay down the law in her advice column like a Puritan forefather. Just *scored* the girls who flirted and accepted valuable presents from men, and who met clandestinely at friends' houses.

"Her letters were so good that several parents wrote to the paper congratulating them on that department. And all the time she was doing the very things which she preached against. She and Charlotte Tatwell were chums, and in all sorts of scrapes together. Charlotte's father used to mourn over her wild ways and try to keep her from running so much with Milly. He thought that Milly had such a bad influence over her. He hadn't the faintest idea that she wrote the Aunt Ruth advice, and twice, when it seemed particularly well aimed at Charlotte's faults, he made her sit down and listen while

he read it aloud to the family. Charlotte thought it was such a good joke on her father that she never enlightened him till he'd repeated the performance several times. He wouldn't believe it at first, didn't think it possible that Milly could have written it, till Charlotte proved that she really had.

"If she could do that, I don't see why I couldn't write better advice to boys than a doddering old man who has only his recollections to draw on. I could criticize the faults that I see before me. Boys need to be shown themselves as they appear to the girls, and I'm not sure but I'll act on Norman's suggestion, and take it up as a side-line."

When supper was cleared away Mary brought out her writing material and wrote several applications for the positions which she knew she was qualified to fill. She could teach in the primary or grammar grades, or take beginner's classes in Domestic Science. She knew that she could adapt herself to almost any kind of person as companion, and her experience with the Mallory twins made her confident that she could do wonders with small children, no matter how refractory. She soon had a whole fleet of applications ready to launch in the morning. Then, inspired by the conversation at the supper-table, she tried her hand at a few answers

to imaginary correspondents, in which were set forth certain criticisms and suggestions which she burned to make to Pink in person, and several others which were peculiarly well fitted to Norman.

Next morning, when Norman came back from the store with the basket of groceries which it was his daily task to bring, he began calling for Mary at the front gate, and kept it up all the way to the kitchen door. When she appeared, towel in hand, asking what was the matter, he set the basket on the step.

Then with mock solemnity he reached into his pocket and pulled out a lavender envelope; lavender crossed faintly with gray lines to give a checked effect. It was addressed in purple ink to Miss Mary Ware, and in the lower left-hand corner was written, with many ornate flourishes, "K. O. B." It smelled so strongly of rose geranium perfume that Mary sniffed disapprovingly as she took it.

"Pink asked me to bring it," said Norman with a grin. "He's to send a boy up for an answer at three o'clock. What do you suppose 'K. O. B.' stands for?"

Mary puzzled over it, shaking her head, then broke the large purple seal.

"Oh, it must mean 'kindness of bearer,' for he

begins the note that way. 'By kindness of bearer I am venturing to send this little missive to know if it will be convenient for you to give me the pleasure of your company this evening. A messenger will call for your answer at three P. M. Trusting that it will accord with my desires, I am yours in friendship's bonds, P. Pinckney Upham.'"

Norman exploded with a loud "whoopee!" of laughter and Mary sniffed again at the strong odor of rose geranium and handed the note to her mother, who had come to the door to see the cause of Norman's mirth.

"The silly boy," exclaimed Mary. "I told him yesterday, when he said that he hoped to call, that we'd all be glad to see him any evening he wanted to drop in. The idea of such formality in a mining camp. And such paper! And such flourishes of purple ink, to say nothing of the strong perfume! Mamma, I don't want him coming to see me."

Mrs. Ware handed the note back with a smile at Mary's disgusted expression. "Don't judge the poor boy too severely. He evidently tried his best to do the proper thing, and probably thinks he has achieved it."

"Yes, Uncle Jerry," added Norman. "Here's your chance. Here's your tide in the affairs of

men, which taken at the flood leads on to fortune! Just cultivate Pink's acquaintance and you'll get enough out of him every week to fill your columns."

Mary ignored his teasing, turning again to her mother to say: "I don't want to answer his note. What did he write for, anyway? Why didn't he just come, as I told him he could?"

"That's the way Sara Downs' beau does," explained Norman. "He always makes an engagement so that she'll be sure to have the best room lighted up and Billy out of the way. He's too bashful to talk to the whole family. They usually go out to the kitchen when he comes, because their house is so small."

"Well, this family won't," declared Mary. "He's no 'beau,' anyway. You'll all have to help entertain him."

She had not answered the note when Jack came home at noon, and she passed it to him without comment. He smiled a little over her evident disgust, and repeated in substance what Mrs. Ware had said, that she must not judge him too severely for his lack of social polish.

"He's a diamond in the rough, Mary," he assured her gravely, but with a twinkle in his eyes. "He may be one of the leading citizens of the state

twenty years from now, and even if he isn't, he's one of the few young fellows of the settlement, and a decent one at that, and you can't afford to snub him because he is green."

"Green Pink is a new kind of color," teased Norman. "Say, Mary, are you going to put a 'K. O. B.' on your answer?"

Mary ignored his question. It irritated her to be teased about Pink as much as it used to annoy her to be teased about the half-witted Peter Finn.

When, in answer to her note, P. Pinckney Upham called that evening, he did not find her sitting up alone in state to receive him. He was ushered in to the cheerful living-room, where the entire family was gathered around the lamp, putting a new dissected puzzle together. Before he knew how it came about his bashfulness had vanished and he was a part of that circle. When the puzzle was completed Mary brought out a chafing-dish and a bowl of nuts, which she commanded him to "pick out," while Jack cracked them. She was going to try a new kind of candy. Later, when he disclosed the fact that he could play a little on the guitar, Norman brought out his mother's, bidding him "tune up and plunk away."

Now if there was one thing Pink was fond of

it was sweets, and if there was one thing he was proud of it was his tenor voice, and presently he began to feel that he was having the time of his life. They were all singing with him, and stopping at intervals to pass the candy and tell funny stories. He was a good mimic and had a keen sense of humor, and he was elated with the consciousness that he had an appreciative audience. In spite of her certainty that the evening would be a bore, Mary found herself really enjoying it, until she realized that Pink was having such a good time that he didn't want to leave. Later she concluded that he wanted to go but didn't know how to tear himself away gracefully.

"Well, I guess I'd better be going," he said when the clock struck ten. It struck eleven when he said it the second time, and it was quarter past when he finally pulled himself out of his chair and looked around for his hat. They all rose, and Jack brought it. With that in hand, he still lingered, talking at random in a way that showed his evident inability to take his leave.

Finally Mrs. Ware put out her hand, saying, "We've enjoyed having you with us so much, this evening, Pinckney. You must come often."

Jack echoed the invitation with a handshake,

and Mary added gaily, "And after this, whatever you do, don't write first to announce your coming. We're used to the boys just dropping in informally. We like it so much better that way."

Pink stopped to reply to that, hesitated with his hand on the knob, and leaning against the door, made some remark about the weather. It was evident that he was fixed to stay until the clock struck again.

Mary reached up to the match-safe hanging near the door and handed him a match. "I wish you'd scratch this as you go out, and see how the thermometer stands. It's hanging on the post just at the right hand of the porch steps. Call back what it registers, please. Thirty-six? Oh, thank you! I'm sure there'll be frost before morning. Good night."

She closed the door and came back into the room, pretending to swoon against Jack, who shook her, exclaiming laughingly, "I think that was a frost, right now."

Just then, Norman, who had disappeared an hour earlier, cautiously opened the door of his bedroom a crack. He was clad in his pajamas. Seeing that the coast was clear he thrust out a dishevelled head and recited dramatically:

"'Parting is such sweet sorrow
I fain would say goodnight until it be to-morrow.'"

Mary blinked at him sleepily, saying with a yawn, "Let this be a lesson to you, son. You can take this from your Uncle Jerry, that there is no social grace more to be desired than the ability to make a nimble and graceful exit when the proper time comes."

As she turned out her light, later, she said to herself, "I'm glad I don't have to look forward to a whole lifetime in Lone-Rock. One such evening is pleasant enough, but a whole winter of them would be dreadful." Then she went to sleep and dreamed that her little fleet of boats had all come home from sea, each one so heavily laden with treasure that she did not know which cargo to draw in first.

CHAPTER III

A NEW FRIEND

ALTHOUGH some of the applications which Mary sent out did not have as far to travel as the first one, she did not count on hearing from any of them within two weeks. However, it was to no fortnight of patient waiting that she settled down. She threw herself into such an orgy of preparations for leaving home, that the days flew around like the wheels of a squirrel cage.

She could not afford any new clothes, but everything in her wardrobe was rejuvenated as far as possible, and a number of things entirely remodelled. One by one they were folded away in her trunk until everything was so shipshape that she could have finished packing at an hour's notice. Then she insisted on giving some freshening touches to her mother's winter outfit, and on beginning a set of shirts for Norman, saying that she wanted to finish all the work she possibly could before leaving home.

Mrs. Ware used to wonder sometimes at her boundless energy. She would whirl through the housework, help prepare the meals, do a morning's ironing, run the sewing machine all afternoon, and then often, after supper, challenge Norman to some such thing as a bonfire race, to see which could rake up the greatest pile of autumn leaves in the yard, by moonlight.

These days of waiting were filled with a queer sense of expectancy, as the air is sometimes charged with electric currents before a storm. No matter what she did or what she thought about, it was always with the sense of something exciting about to happen. The feeling exhilarated her, deepened the glow in her face, the happy eagerness in her eyes, until every one around her felt the contagion of her high hopefulness.

"I don't know what it is you're always looking so pleased over," the old postmaster said to her one day, "but every time after you've been in here, I catch myself smiling away as broadly as if I'd heard some good news myself."

"Maybe," answered Mary, "it's because I feel all the time as if I'm just *going* to hear some. It's so interesting wondering what turn things will take. It's like waiting for the curtain to go up on a new

play that you've never heard of before. My curtain may go up in any part of the United States. It all depends on which letter it is that brings me a position."

"I should think you'd be a leetle mite anxious," said the Captain, who was in somewhat of a pessimistic mood that day. "They can't all be equally good. You remember what the old hymn says:

"'Should I be carried to the skies on flowery beds of ease
Whilst others fought to win the prize, and sailed through bloody seas.'"

"Oh, I'm not expecting any flowery beds of ease," retorted Mary. "I don't mind hard work and all sorts of disagreeable things if they'll only prove to be stepping-stones to carry me through my Red Sea. I don't even ask to go over dry-shod as the Children of the Exodus did. All I want is a chance to wade."

"That's right! That's right!" exclaimed the Captain admiringly. "That's the proper spirit to show. It's a pity, though, that you can't do your wading somewhere around Lone-Rock. We'll miss you dreadfully. And I'm not the only one who thinks so, either. From all I hear there's somebody up the street who would almost rob the mails if do-

ing so would keep you from getting a letter calling you away."

From the twinkle of the eyes which peered at her through the steel-bowed glasses, Mary knew that he was referring to Pink Upham, but before she could reply the mail carrier dashed up on horseback from the railroad station, with the big leather pouch swung across the horse in front of him. It was the signal for every one along the street, who had seen him, to come sauntering into the office to wait for the distribution of the mail. Mary climbed up on the high stool again. She had started out from home, intending to take a tramp far up the mountain road, but stopping in the office to post a letter had stayed on talking longer than she intended.

Pink Upham was one of the first to come in. He had been at the house several times since his first call, and while some of his mannerisms annoyed Mary even more than they had at first, she liked him better as their acquaintance progressed. She could not help being pleased at the attention he gave her slightest remarks. No girl can be wholly oblivious to the compliment of having every word remembered, every preference noted. Once, when they were looking at some soap advertisements, in a most careless off-hand way she had expressed her dislike

for strong perfumes. Since then the odor of rose geranium was no longer noticeable in his wake. Once she announced her admiration of a certain kind of scarlet berry which grew a long distance up the mountain. The next day there was a bunch of them left at her door. Pink had taken a tramp before breakfast to get them for her.

There was a family discussion one night about celluloid. Nobody could answer one of Mary's questions in connection with it about camphor gum, and she forgot it almost as soon as it was asked, although she had assumed an air of intense curiosity at the time. But Pink remembered. He thought about it, in fact, as one of his chief duties in life to find its answer, until he had time to consult Mr. Moredock's encyclopædia.

At his last visit to the Wares he had seen a kodak picture of Mary, taken at the Wigwam years before. She was mounted on the Indian pony Washington. She wore short dresses then. Her wide-brimmed Mexican sombrero was on the back of her head, and she was laughing so heartily that one could not look at the picture without feeling the contagion of her enjoyment. There was nothing she liked better than horseback riding, she remarked as she laid the picture aside, but she had not tried it since

she was a child. That was one thing she was looking forward to in her promised land, she told him, to owning a beautiful thoroughbred saddle-horse, like Lloyd Sherman's.

Then Pink was shown "The Little Colonel's Corner," for the collection of Lloydsboro Valley pictures were grouped in panels on one wall of the Lone-Rock home as they had been at the Wigwam. First there was Lloyd in her little Napoleon hat, riding on Tarbaby down the long locust avenue, and then Lloyd on the horse that later took the place of the black pony. Then Lloyd in her Princess Winsome costume, with the dove and the spinning-wheel, and again in white, beside the gilded harp, and again as the Queen of Hearts and as the Maid of Honor at Eugenia's wedding.

In showing these pictures to Pink and telling him how well Lloyd rode and how graceful she was in the saddle, Mary forgot her casual remark about her own enjoyment of riding, but Pink remembered. He had thought about it at intervals ever since. Now catching sight of her on the high stool, he hurried into the post-office to tell her that he could secure two horses any morning that she would go out with him before breakfast. His uncle owned the team of buckskins which drew the de-

livery wagon, and was willing for him to use them any morning before eight o'clock. They were not stylish-looking beasts, he admitted, like Kentucky thoroughbreds, but they were sure-footed and used to mountain trails.

As Mary thanked him with characteristic enthusiasm, she was conscious of a double thrill of pleasure. One came from the fact that he had planned such enjoyment for her, the other that he had remembered her casual remark and attached so much importance to it. She'd let him know later just when she could go, she told him. She'd have to see her mother first, and she'd have to get up some kind of a riding skirt.

Then the Captain threw up the delivery window, and half a dozen people who had been waiting crowded forward to get their mail. Mary waited on the stool while Pink took his turn at the window and came back with her mail. His own, and that for the store, he drew out from one of the large locked boxes below the pigeon-holes. While he was unlocking it Mary looked over the letters he had laid in her lap. There was one from Joyce, one to her mother from Phil Tremont, and one bearing the address in an upper corner of one of the agencies to which she had written. She opened

it eagerly, and Pink, watching her from the corner of his eye as he sorted a handful of circulars, saw a shade of disappointment cross her face. Every one else had left the office. She looked up to see the old Captain smiling at her.

"First ship in from sea," he remarked knowingly. "Well, what's the cargo?"

"No treasure aboard this one. It's just a printed form to say that they have no vacancies at present, but have put me on the waiting list, and will inform me if anything comes up later."

"Well, there're others to hear from," the Captain answered. "That's the good of putting your hopes on more than one thing. In the meantime, though, don't get discouraged."

"Oh, I'll not," was the cheerful answer. "You see, I have two mottoes to live up to. One was on the crest that used to be sported in the ancestral coat of arms once upon a time, away back in mamma's family. It was a winged spur with the words *'Ready, aye ready.'*

"The other is the one we adopted ourselves from the Vicar of Wakefield: *'Let us be inflexible, and fortune will at last change in our favor.'* So there I am, ready to go at a moment's notice, but also bound to keep inflexible and wait for a turn if for-

tune wills it so. I don't know what the Ware family would do sometimes without that saying of the old Vicar's. His philosophy has helped us out of more than one hole."

The Captain, rather vague in his knowledge as to the old Vicar, nodded sagely. "Pretty good philosophy to tie to," he remarked. Pink, to whom the Vicar was merely a name, one of many in a long list of English novels he had once memorized for a literature recitation, made no response. He felt profoundly ignorant. But remembering Mr. Moredock's hospitable remark that the latchstring of his library was always out for his friends, he resolved to borrow the book that very night after closing hours, and discover what there was in it that had "helped the Ware family out of more than one hole."

As he and Mary left the office together the Captain called after her, "By the way, I noticed a foreign stamp on one of your letters. Mexican, wasn't it? If you're not making a collection yourself, I'd like to speak for it. My little grandson's just started one, and I've promised him all I can get."

Mary paused on the doorstep. "The letter is mamma's, but I'm sure she would not mind if I were to cut the stamp out of the envelope."

In an instant Pink's knife was out of his pocket, and he was cutting deftly around the stamp, while Mary held the envelope flat against the door. He did it slowly, in order not to cut through into the letter, and he could not fail to notice the big dashing hand in which it was addressed to Mrs. Emily Ware. It looked so familiar that it puzzled him to recall where he had seen it before.

"I can bring you a lot more like this, if you want them," said Mary, as she gave the stamp to the postmaster. "Jack and I each get letters from this friend down in Mexico, and he writes to mamma nearly every week."

The Captain thanked her emphatically, and she and Pink started off again, she towards home and he towards the store. A dozen times before closing hours Pink recalled the scene at the post-office, Mary holding the letter up against the door for him to cut out the stamp. What firm, capable-looking little hands she had, with their daintily kept nails, and how pink her cheeks were, and how fluffy and brown the hair blowing out from under the stylish little hat with the bronze quills.

Each time he recalled the letter he puzzled over the familiar appearance of the address, until suddenly, as he was filling a jug at the spigot of a

molasses barrel, he remembered. He had seen the same handwriting under a photograph on the mantel at Mrs. Ware's: "Philip Tremont, Necaxa, Mexico." And on the back was pencilled, "For Aunt Emily, from her 'other boy.'" Mary had called upon Pink to admire the picture which had arrived that same day, and had referred to Phil several times since as "The Best Man."

Pink almost let the molasses jug overflow, while thinking about it and wondering why she had given him such a nickname. He resolved to ask her why if he could ever screw his courage up to such a point.

Mary, hurrying home with the letters from Joyce and Phil, eager to hear what was in them, never gave Pink another thought till after supper, when she remembered his invitation and began a search for Joyce's old riding-skirt. It was not in any of the trunks or closets in the house, but remembering several boxes which had been stored in the loft above the woodshed, she made Jack climb up the ladder with her to open them, while she held the lantern. At the bottom of the last box they found what she was searching for, not only the khaki skirt, but the little Norfolk jacket which completed the outfit. Thanks to Joyce's orderly habits they had been packed away clean and whole, and

needed only the magic touch of a hot iron to make them presentable.

There was something else in the box which Mary pounced upon and carried down the ladder. It was a bag containing odds and ends of zephyrs and yarns, left from various afghans and pieces of fancy work. Opened under the sitting-room lamp it disclosed, among other things, several skeins of wool as red as the flash of a cardinal's wing. "Enough to make a whole Tam-O'-Shanter!" exclaimed Mary jubilantly, "and a fluffy pompon on top! I can have it ready by day after to-morrow. I've been wondering what I could wear on my head. I simply can't keep a hat on when I ride fast! Here, Norman, be a dear duck of a brother and hold this skein while I wind, won't you?"

Norman made a wry face and held out his arms with pretended unwillingness, but she slipped the skein over his hands, saying, "Item for Uncle Jerry's Column. 'A young gentleman should always spring nimbly to the service of a lady, and offer his assistance with alacrity.'"

"Say," he interrupted in the tone of one having a real grievance. "You've got to quit making a catspaw of me when you want to teach Pink Upham manners. You know well enough that I always

pick up your handkerchief and stand until mamma is seated, and things like that, so you needn't hint about 'em to me when he's here. You're just trying to slap at Pink over my shoulders."

"Oh, you don't mind a little thing like that," laughed Mary. "It's for the good of your country, my boy. I'm just trying to polish up one of the pillars of the new state that you and mamma and Jack are so interested in. Besides, Pink is so quick to take a hint that it's really interesting to see how much a few suggestions can accomplish."

"Humph! You're singing a different tune from what you did at first. You thought he was so tiresome and his laugh so awful and that he had such dreadful taste — "

"I still think so," answered Mary, "but I don't notice his wild laugh so much now that I am used to it, and he has many traits which make him very companionable. Besides, I am sorry for him. He'd have been very different if he'd had *your* opportunities, for instance."

"Mary is right," agreed Mrs. Ware, smiling at Norman's grimace. "I think it would be a good thing to ask him to stop when you come back from your ride and have breakfast with us."

Norman groaned, then said with a vigorous nod

of the head, since his hands were too busy with the skein for gestures, "Well, have him if you want to, but I'll give you fair warning, Mary Ware, if you go to getting off any of your Uncle Jerry remarks on me for his benefit, I'll let the cat right out of the bag."

Mary replied with a grimace so much like his own, that it brought on a contest in which the yarn winding was laid aside for a time, while they stood before a mirror, each trying to outdo the other in making grotesque faces.

Two mornings after that, in Joyce's khaki riding-suit and the new red Tam-O'-Shanter, Mary swung into the saddle while Pink held both horses, and they were off for an early gallop in the frosty October dawn. The crisp, tingling air of the mountains brought such color into Mary's face, and such buoyancy into her spirits that Pink watched her as he would have watched some rare kind of a bird, skimming along beside him. He had never known such a girl. There was not a particle of coquetry in her attitude towards him. She didn't glance up with pretty appealing side-glances as Sara Downs did, or say little personal things which naturally called for compliments in reply. She was like a boy in her straightforward plain dealing with him, her

joking banter, her keen interest in the mountain life and her knowledge of wood lore. One never knew which way her quick-winged thoughts might dart. As they rode on he began to feel as if he was thoroughly awake for the first time in his life.

Up to this time he had been fairly well satisfied with himself. A small inheritance safely invested and his one year at college had given him the prestige of a person of both wealth and education in the little town where he had lived until recently. Yet there was Jack, who had not even finished a High School course, and Mary, who had had less than a year at Warwick Hall, on such amazing terms of intimacy with a world outside of his ken, that he felt illiterate and untutored beside them. Even Norman seemed to have a wider horizon than himself, and he wondered what made the difference.

He divined the reason afterward when they came back from their ride and sat at breakfast in the sunny dining-room. It was Mrs. Ware who had lifted their life out of the ordinary by the force of her rare personality. Through all their poverty and trouble and hard times she had kept fast hold on her early standards of refinement and culture, and made them a part of her family's daily living.

Pink felt the difference, even in the breakfast.

It was no better than the one he would have had at home, but at home there would have been no interesting conversation, no glowing bit of color in the centre of the table like this bowl of autumn leaves and berries. At home there would have been no attempt at any pleasing effect in the dainty serving of courses. There ham was ham and eggs were eggs, and it made no difference how they were slapped on to the table, so long as they were well cooked. There, meal-time was merely a time to satisfy one's appetite as quickly as possible and hurry away from the table as soon as the food was devoured. Here, the day seemed to take its keynote from the illuminated text of a calendar hanging beside the fireplace. It was a part of *The Salutation of the Dawn* from the Sanskrit:

> "For yesterday is but a dream,
> And to-morrow is only a vision;
> But to-day well-lived, makes
> Every yesterday a dream of happiness
> And every to-morrow a vision of hope.
> *Look well, therefore, to this day!*
> *Such is the Salutation of the Dawn.*"

The Ware breakfast-table seemed to be the place where they all gathered to get a good start for the day. It was Mrs. Ware who gave it, and gave it unconsciously, not so much by what she said as

what she was. One felt her hopefulness, her serenity of soul, as one feels the cheer of a warm hearthstone.

Pink could not recall one word she had said to stimulate his ambition, but when he rode away on one horse, leading the other, he was trying to adjust himself to a new set of standards. He felt that there was something to live for besides taking in dimes over the counter of a country store. One thing happened at breakfast which made him glow with pleasure whenever he thought of it. It was the quick look of approval which Mary flashed him when he answered one of her sallies by a quotation about green spectacles.

"Oh, you know the old Vicar too!" she exclaimed, as if claiming mutual acquaintance with a real friend. "Don't you love him?"

Pink was glad that some interruption spared him the necessity of an enthusiastic assent. He had not been specially thrilled by the book, so far as he had read, but he attacked it manfully again that night, feeling that there must be more in it than he had wit to discover, else the Wares would not have adopted it as "guide, philosopher and friend."

CHAPTER IV

THE WITCH WITH A WAND

Snow lay deep over Lone-Rock, muffling every sound. It was so still in the cozy room where Jack sat reading by the lamp, that several times he found himself listening to the intense silence, as if it had been a noise. No one moved in the house. He and Mary were alone together, and she on the other side of the table was apparently as interested in a pile of letters which she was re-reading as he was in his story. But presently, when he finished it and tossed the magazine aside, he saw that his usually jolly little sister was sitting in a disconsolate bunch by the fire, her face buried in her hands.

She had pushed the letters from her lap, and the open pages lay scattered around her on the floor. There were five of them, from different employment agencies. Jack had read them all before supper, just as he had been reading similar ones at intervals for the last two months and a half. The answers had always been disappointing, but until

to-day they had come singly and far apart. Undismayed, she had met them all in the spirit of their family motto, insisting that fortune would be compelled to change in her favor soon. She'd be so persistent it couldn't help itself.

Five disappointments, however, all coming by the same post, were more than she could meet calmly. Besides, these were the five positions which seemed the most promising. The thought that they were the last on her list, and that there was no clue now left for her to follow, was the thought that weighed her down with the heaviest discouragement she had ever felt in all her life. She had made a brave effort not to show it when Jack came home to supper earlier in the evening. The two ate alone for the first time that she could remember, Mrs. Ware and Norman having been invited to take supper with the Downs family. It was a joint birthday anniversary, Billy Downs and his mother happening to claim the same day of the month, though many years apart.

Mary talked cheerfully of the reports Billy had brought of the two cakes that were to adorn the table, one with fifteen candles for him and the boys, and one with forty-eight icing roses for his mother and her friends. She had put on a brave, even a

jolly front, until this last re-reading of her letters. Now she had given away to such a sense of helplessness and defeat that it showed in every line of the little figure huddled up in front of the fire.

Jack noticed it as he tossed aside his magazine and sat watching her a moment. Then he exclaimed sympathetically, "Cheer up, Mary. Never mind the old letters. You'll have better luck next time."

There was no answer. A profound silence followed, so deep that he could hear the ticking of a clock across the hall, coming faintly through closed doors.

"Cheer up, Sis!" he exclaimed again, knowing that if he could only start her to talking she would soon drag herself out of her slough of despond.

"Don't all the calendars and cards nowadays tell you to *smile,* no matter what happens? Don't you know that

> "'The man worth while is the man who can smile
> When everything goes dead wrong?'"

His question drew the retort he hoped for, and she exclaimed savagely, "I *hate* those silly old cheerfulness calendars! And deliver me from people who follow their advice! It's just as foolish to go through life smiling at every kind of circumstances that fate hands out as it would be to wear

furs in all kinds of weather, even the dog-days. What's the use of pretending that the sun is shining when everybody can see that the rain's simply drenching you and that you're as bedraggled as a wet hen?"

"Well, the sun *is* shining," persisted Jack. "Always, somewhere. Our little rain clouds don't stop it. All they can do is to hide it from us awhile."

"You tell that to old Noah," grumbled Mary, her face still hidden in her hands. "Much good the sun behind his rain clouds did him! If he hadn't had an ark he'd have been washed off the face of the earth like the other flood sufferers. Seems to me it's sort of foolish to smile when you've been swept clean down and out. Five turndowns in one day —"

Her voice broke, and she gave the scattered letters an impatient push with her foot. Her tone of unusual bitterness stopped Jack's playful attempt to console her. He sat looking into the fire a little space, considering what to say. When he spoke again it was in a firm, quiet tone, almost fatherly in its kindness.

"There's no reason, Mary, for you to be so utterly miserable over your disappointments. There is no actual need for you to go out into the world

to make your own living and fight your own way. It was different when I was a helpless cripple. Then I had to sit by and watch you and Joyce and mother struggle to keep us all afloat. But I'm able to furnish a very comfortable little ark for you now, and I'd be glad to have you stay in it always. I didn't interfere when you first announced your intention of starting out to seek your fortune, because I knew you'd never be satisfied to settle down in this quiet mining camp until you'd tried something different. But now the question of your staying here seems to have been settled for you, there's no use letting the disappointment down you so completely. What's your big brother for if not to take care of you?"

"Oh, Jack! You're an old darling!" she cried, with tears in her eyes. "It's dear of you to put it that way, and I do appreciate it even if I don't seem to. But — there's something inside of me that just won't let me settle down to be taken care of by my family. I have my own place to make in the world. I have my own life to live!"

She saw his amused, indulgent smile and cried out indignantly, "Well, you'd scorn a *boy* who'd be satisfied with that kind of life. Just because I'm a girl is no reason that I should be dependent

on you the rest of my days. You wouldn't want Norman to."

"No," admitted Jack, "but that is different. I should think you could understand how a fellow feels about his little sister when he's the head of the family. He regards her as one of his first responsibilities, to look out for her and take care of her."

Mary straightened up in her chair and looked at him with a perplexed expression, saying in a slow, puzzled way, "Jack, it makes me almost cross-eyed trying to see your way and my way at the same time. Your way is so dear and sweet and generous that I feel like a dog to say a word against it, and yet — *please* don't get mad — it *is* an old-fashioned way. Nowadays girls don't want to be kept at home on a shelf like a piece of fragile china. When they're well and strong and capable of taking care of themselves they want a chance to strike out and realize their ambitions just as a boy would. Joyce did it, and look what she's doing for herself and how happy she is."

"Yes," he admitted. "Her work is her very life, and her success in it means just as much to her as mine here at the mines does to me. But I can't see what particular ambition you'd be reali-

zing in filling any of the positions you've applied for. You couldn't do more than drudge along and make a bare living at first. There'd be very little time and energy left for ambitions."

"Well, I'd be satisfying one of them at any rate," she persisted. "I'd be at least 'paddling my own canoe' and making a place for myself where I'd be really needed. Oh, yes, I know what you're going to say," she added hurriedly, as he tried to interrupt her. "Just what mamma said, that you do need me here to keep things stirred up and lively. That might be all right if we were going to live along this way always. If you'd settle down to be a nice comfortable old bachelor, I could try to be an ideal old-fashioned spinster sister. But you'll be getting married some day, and then I won't be needed at all, and it'll be too late for me to strike out then and be a modern, up-to-date bachelor maid like Miss Henrietta Robbins. I know that Captain Doane says that old maid aunts are the salt of the earth," she added, a twinkle in her eyes taking the place of the tear which she hastily dashed away with the back of her hand, "but I don't want to be one in somebody else's home. If I have to be one at all I want to be the Miss Henrietta kind. But," she admitted honestly,

"I'd rather marry some day, after I'd done all the other things I've planned to, and no Prince Charming will ever find his way to Lone-Rock. You know that perfectly well."

Jack threw back his head to laugh at the dolorous tone of her confession, and then grew suddenly sober, staring into the fire, as if her remarks had started a very serious train of thoughts. The snow-muffled silence was so deep that again the ticking of the distant clock sounded through closed doors.

"Sometimes," he began presently, "when I see the way you chafe at the loneliness here, and hate the monotony and long so desperately to get away, I wonder if any girl would be happy here. If I would have a right even to ask one to share such a life with me."

Mary gave him a keen, penetrating glance, her pulses throbbing at this beginning of a confidence. She hesitated to say anything, for fear her reply might stop him, but when he seemed waiting for her answer she said with a worldly-wise air, "That depends on the girl. If it were Kitty Walton or Gay or Roberta, they'd be simply bored to death up here. They're so used to constant entertainment. But if it were somebody like Betty, it would

be different. Lone-Rock isn't any lonesomer than the Cuckoo's Nest was, and she loved that place. And this would be a good quiet spot where she could go on with her writing, so she wouldn't have to give up her ambition."

Then, feeling that perhaps she was expatiating too much in the direction of Betty, she added hastily, "But there's one thing I hadn't thought of. Of course that would make it all right for any kind of a girl, even for a Gay or a Roberta. *You'd* be her Prince Charming, so of course you'd 'live happily ever after.'"

Again Jack laughed heartily, lying back in the big Morris chair. Then reaching out for the paper cutter on the table, he began toying with it as he often did when he talked. But this time, instead of saying anything, he sat looking into the fire, slowly drawing the ivory blade in and out through his closed fingers.

The fore-log burned through, suddenly broke apart between the andirons, and falling into a bed of glowing coals beneath, sent a puff of ashes out on to the hearth. Mary leaned forward to reach for the turkey-wing hanging beside the tongs. There had always been a turkey-wing beside her Grandmother Ware's fireplace. That is why Mary

"'I WISH WE COULD SETTLE THINGS BY A FEATHER, AS THEY USED TO IN THE OLD FAIRY TALES.'"

insisted on using one now instead of a modern hearth-broom. It suggested so pleasantly the housewifely thrift and cleanliness of an earlier generation which she loved to copy. She had prepared this wing herself, stretching and drying it under a heavy weight, and binding the quill ends into a handle with a piece of brown ribbon.

Now as she flirted it briskly across the hearth, a tiny fluff of down detached itself from one of the stiff quills, and floated to the rug. When she picked it up it clung to her fingers, and only after repeated attempts did she succeed in dislodging it, and in blowing it into the fire.

"I wish we could settle things by a feather, as they used to in the old fairy tales," she said wistfully, looking after the bit of down. "Just say:

"'Feather, feather, when I blow
Point the way that I should go.'

Then there would be no endless worry and waiting and indecision. It would be up to the feather to settle the matter."

"Why not wish for your 'witch with a wand,' as you used to do?" asked Jack. "There used to be a time when scarcely a day passed that you did not make that wish."

Mary's answer was a sudden exclamation and

a clasping of her hands together as she turned towards him, her face radiant.

"Jack, you've given me an idea! Don't you remember that's what we took to calling Cousin Kate after she gave Joyce that trip abroad, and did so many lovely things for all of us — our witch with a wand! I've a notion to write to her and ask her if she can't help me get a position of some kind. Didn't she endow a library in the little village where she was born? Seems to me I remember hearing something about it a long time ago. Maybe I could get a position in it."

Jack shook his head decidedly. "No, Mary, I don't like your idea at all. She did endow a library, and she's interested in so many things of the kind that she could doubtless pull strings in all directions. But mother wouldn't like to have you ask any favors of her, I'm sure. I wouldn't do it myself, and I shouldn't think you'd want to, after all she's done for us."

"But I'd not be asking her for money or *things*," declared Mary. "I'd only ask her to use her influence, and I don't see why she wouldn't be as willing to do it for her own 'blood and kin' as she would for working girls and Rest Cottage people and fresh-air babies. I'm going to try it anyhow.

I'll take all the blame myself. I'll tell her that mamma doesn't know I'm writing, and that you told me not to."

"But she's been out of touch with us for so long," persisted Jack, frowning. "She promised once, that if Joyce reached a certain point in her work she'd give her a term or two in Paris, and Joyce reached it a year ago. Cousin Kate knows it, for she was at the studio and saw for herself what Joyce was doing, but she was so interested in two blind children that she had taken under her wing, that she couldn't talk of anything else. She had gone down to New York to consult some specialist about them, and she was considering adopting them. She told Joyce that she wouldn't hesitate, only she had made such inroads on her capital to keep up her social settlement work, that there was danger of her ending her own days in some kind of an asylum or old ladies' home. She nearly lost her own sight several years ago. That is why she takes such an especial interest in those two children."

Mary considered his news in silence a moment, then remarked stubbornly, "She might like to have me come on and help take care of the blind children. At any rate it will cost only a postage stamp to find

out, and I can afford that much of an investment. I'll write now, before mamma gets back."

Knowing that the composition of such a letter would be a long and painstaking affair, Mary did not risk beginning it on her precious monogram stationery. She brought out some scraps of paper instead, and with the arm of her chair for a desk, scribbled down with a pencil a rough draft of all she wanted to say to this Cousin Kate, who had been the good fairy of her childhood. Many erasures and changes were necessary, and it was nearly an hour later when she read it all over, highly pleased with her own production. She wondered how it would affect Jack, and glanced over at him, so sure of its excellence that she was tempted to read it aloud. But Jack, having read himself drowsy, had gone to sleep in his chair, and she knew that even if she should waken him by clashing the tongs or upsetting the rocker, he would not be in a mood to appreciate her epistle as it deserved.

So she sat jabbing the paper with her pencil till it had a wide border of dots and dashes, while she pictured to herself the probable effect of the letter on her Cousin Kate. Hope sprang up again as buoyant as if it had not been crushed to earth a score of times in the last few months, and she

thought exultingly, "Now *this* will surely bring a satisfactory reply!"

A far-away jingle of sleigh-bells sounded presently, coming nearer and nearer down the snowy road, then stopped in front of the house. Mr. Downs was bringing the birthday banqueters home in his sleigh, according to promise.

Mary sprang up to open the door. At the first faint sound of the bells she had folded the sheet of paper into a tiny square, and tucked it into her belt. She had a feeling that Jack was wrong about her writing to Cousin Kate, and that her mother would not disapprove as strongly as he seemed to think she would, if the matter could be put properly before her. But she intended to take no risks. There would be time enough to confess what she had done when the answer came, promising her the coveted position.

Mrs. Ware and Norman came in glowing from their sleigh-ride.

"You certainly must have had a good time," exclaimed Mary, noticing the unusual animation of her mother's face. "You ought to go to a birthday dinner every night if it can shake you up and make you look as young and bright-eyed as you do now."

"Oh, it isn't that," laughed Mrs. Ware, as Jack took her heavy coat from her and Mary her furs. "We did have a beautiful time, but it is *this* which has gone to my head."

She took a letter from the muff which Mary had just laid on a chair, and as soon as she could slip off her gloves, began to unfold it without waiting to lay aside her hat.

"It's a letter from Joyce which that naughty Norman has been carrying around all day. He didn't remember to give it to me until he was putting on his overcoat to start home, and discovered it in one of the pockets. I just *had* to open it while the other guests were making their adieus, and I've read enough to set me all in a whirl. Joyce's long dreamed of happiness has come at last! She's to go to Paris in a few weeks, but first — *she's coming home to spend Christmas with us!*"

Mrs. Ware paused to enjoy the effect of her announcement. She was in such a quiver of delight herself that Mary's happy cry of astonishment and Jack's excited exclamation did not do justice to the occasion. Only long-legged Norman's demonstration seemed adequate. Standing on his head he turned one somersault after another across the room, till he landed perilously near Mary, who gave

him a sharp tweak of the ear as he came up in a sitting posture beside her.

"Oh, you wretch!" she exclaimed. "To keep such news in your pocket all day! I'm going to tell Captain Doane never to give you any letters again, if you can't deliver them more promptly than that!"

"Sh!" she added, as Norman began a string of excuses for his forgetfulness. "Mamma is going to read it aloud."

"Beloved Family," the letter began. "Ere you have recovered from the shock of the announcement I am about to make, we shall be dismantling the studio, packing our trunks and making preparations to shift our little establishment from New York to Paris. At least, Miss Henrietta and I expect to go to Paris and carry on the same kind of studio-apartment housekeeping that we have done here. Mrs. Boyd and Lucy have gone to Florida, but they may join us next summer.

"But first, before I put the ocean between us, I'm going home for a glimpse of you all. It is a long journey for such a short visit, but I can't go so far without seeing you all once more, just at Christmas time too, when we've been separated so

many Christmases. It is Cousin Kate who has made all this possible. She did not adopt those little blind children after all. She was taken with a spell of typhoid fever while she was trying to make up her mind, and has never been well enough since to consider burdening herself in such a way. She sailed yesterday with her maid for the south of France, by the doctor's orders. Later, if she is better, she is going back to Tours, where she and I had such a happy year. Old Madame Gréville is no longer living in the villa near the Gate of the Giant Scissors, but Cousin Kate hopes to find lodgings near there. She has just spent a week with us while she was making preparations for her journey, and the visit revived all her old interest in my work. She was pleased to find that I am doing practical money-making things like designing book-covers, etc., but she wants me to widen my field, she says.

"She insists on giving me this year abroad, and says it is pure selfishness on her part, because she may want to attach herself to our Paris establishment later on. She is so alone in the world. I am sure that I can make it up to her some day, all that she is doing for me now, in the way that will make her very happy. So I am accepting as cor-

dially as she is giving. When I told her how long I have been away from you all, and that I thought I'd take part of my savings for a flying visit home, she thought I ought to do so by all means, and said that she wanted to add to the happiness of the family, especially mamma's, by sending a handsome Christmas present back with me.

"For several days it seemed as if she would not be able to get exactly what she wanted, but it was finally arranged, just at the last moment, after much trouble on her part. It's perfectly grand, but I've sworn not to even hint at what it is. So expect me Christmas Eve with The Surprise. I'll not write again in the meantime, as I am so very, very busy. Till then good-bye.

"Yours lovingly and joyfully,

"JOYCE."

As Mrs. Ware looked up from her reading, everybody spoke at once. "It's almost too good to be true," was Jack's quick exclamation. "What do you suppose the surprise will be?" Norman's eager question. While Mary, clasping her elbow with her hands, as if hugging herself in sheer ecstasy, cried, "Oh, I just *love* to be knocked flat and have my breath taken away with unexpected

news like that! It makes you tingle all over and at the same time have a queer die-away feeling too, like when you swoop down in a swing!"

Mrs. Ware took down the almanac hanging in the chimney corner, and began to turn the pages, looking for the one marked December.

"Oh, you needn't count the days till Christmas," said Mary. "I've been marking them off my calendar every morning and can tell you to a dot. Not that I had expected to take much interest in celebrating this year, but just from force of habit, I suppose. But now we'll have to 'put the big pot in the little one,' as they say back in Kentucky, in honor of our being all together once more."

"All but Holland," corrected Mrs. Ware sadly, with the wistful look which always came into her eyes whenever his name was mentioned. "That's the worst of giving up a boy to the Navy. One has to give him up so completely."

There was such a note of longing in her voice that Jack hastened to say, "But the worst of it is nearly over now, little mother. He'll be home on his first furlough next summer."

"Yes, but the years will have made a man of him," answered Mrs. Ware. "He'll not be the same boy that left us, and he'll be here such a short

time that we'll hardly have time to make his acquaintance."

"Oh, but think of when he gets to be a high and mighty Admiral," exclaimed Mary, comfortingly. "You'll be so proud of him you'll forget all about the separation. Between him and the Governor I don't know what will happen to your pride. It will be so inflated."

Mary had laughingly called Jack the Governor ever since Mrs. Ware's complacent remark that day on the train, that it would not surprise her to have such an honor come to her oldest son some day.

"And Joyce, don't forget *her*," put in Norman, feeling in his pocket for a handful of nuts which he had carried away from the birthday feast. "The way she's started out she'll have a place in your hall of fame, too. And me — don't forget *this* Abou Ben Adhem. Probably my name'll lead all the rest. Where do *you* expect to come in, Mary? What will *you* do?"

As he spoke he placed a row of pecans under the rocker of his chair, and bore down on them until the shells cracked. When he had picked out a handful of kernels, he popped them into his mouth all at once.

"We'll write your name as the Great American

Cormorant," laughed Mary, ignoring his question about herself. "You remember that verse, don't you?

"'C, my dear, is the Cormorant.
When he don't eat more it's because he can't.'

"Mamma, didn't he eat anything at all at the Downs'? He's been stuffing ever since he came back — cake and candy, and now those nuts. It's positively disgraceful to carry food away in your pockets the way you do, Norman Ware."

"I always do when I go to Billy's house," answered Norman, undisturbed by her criticism, and crashing his rocker down on a row of almonds. "And Billy always does the same here. We're not company. We're home folks at both places."

The shells which he threw toward the fire missed their aim and fell on the hearth. Mary pointed significantly toward the turkey-wing, and he as significantly shrugged his shoulders, in token that he would not sweep up the mess he had made. They kept up a playful pantomime some time, while Jack and his mother went on discussing Joyce's home-coming, before he finally obeyed her peremptory gesture. He thought she was in one of her jolliest moods, induced by the glorious news of

the letter. But all the time she was silently repeating his question, "Where do *you* expect to come in, Mary? What will *you* do?"

Here she was, baffled again. The time she had spent in writing that letter, now tucked away under her belt, was wasted. It was out of the question to appeal to Cousin Kate now, just when she had done so much for another member of the family, and especially when she had sailed away to so vague a place as the south of France, by the doctor's orders. Even if Mary had her address, she felt it would be wrong to bother her with a request which would require any "pulling of strings." For that could not be done without letter writing, and in her state of health even that might be some tax on her strength, which she had no right to ask. Hope, that had soared so buoyantly an hour before, once more sank despairingly to earth. What was she to do? Which way could she turn next?

When bedtime came a little later, Mrs. Ware went in to Norman's room to take some extra cover. Mary lingered to pin some newspapers around her potted plants and move them away from the windows. Jack, standing in front of the fireplace, winding the clock on the mantel, saw her slip a folded paper from under her belt, and toss it into

the fire with such a tragic gesture, that he knew without telling that it was the letter on which she had worked so industriously. She saw that he understood and she was grateful that he said nothing.

While they were undressing, Mrs. Ware talked so happily of Joyce's return, that Mary's own glow of anticipation came back. She was not jealous of her sister's good fortune. She had never been that. She was wholly, generously glad for every good thing that had ever come into Joyce's life, and she was so thrilled with the thought of her coming home that she was sure she should lie awake all night thinking about it. But when she snuggled down under the warm covers, it was Norman's question which kept her awake. "Where do *you* expect to come in, Mary? What are *you* going to do?"

CHAPTER V

P STANDS FOR PINK

WHAT happened in the Christmas holidays which followed is best told in the letter which Mary wrote to Phil Tremont on the last day of the old year.

"DEAR BEST MAN:" it began. "Mamma has asked me to write to you this time in her place, as she has succumbed to an attack of 'reunionitis.' She doesn't call it that, but we know well enough that it is nothing but the excitement and unexpectedness of having a whole family reunion which has frazzled her out so completely. She wrote you that Joyce was coming home, but none of us knew that Holland would be with her. *He* was the surprise — Cousin Kate's Christmas gift to the family. His furlough is not due till next summer, but she said by that time Joyce would be in Paris, and the chances are that if we didn't get together now we might never again be able to; at least for years and years.

"Cousin Kate is such a solitary soul herself, no relatives nearer than cousins, that she has an immense amount of sentiment for family gatherings, and that is why she gave us such a happy one. She had to go to Washington to arrange it. She has a friend at court in the shape of a senator who was once an intimate school chum of the President's. (We think he was one of her many bygone suitors. Isn't that romantic?) Among them they managed to untie enough red tape to let Holland out.

"You can imagine our astonishment when he walked in. We almost swooned with joy, and I thought for a moment that mamma really was going to, the surprise was so great. You saw him just before you went to Mexico, so you know how big he has grown, and how impressively dignified he can be on occasion. And polite — My! What a polish the Navy can give! He was so polite that I was awestruck at first, and it was two whole days before I felt familiar enough to dare to refer to the time that he dragged me down the hay-mow by my hair because I wouldn't come any other way.

"It has been a wonderful week; yet, isn't it queer, as I look back on it, there is nothing at all in it really worth putting into a letter. It is just

that after the first strangeness wore off, we seemed to slip back into the dear old good times of the Wigwam days. You know better than any one else in the world what they were, for you shared them with us so often. You know how we have always enjoyed each other and what entertainment we found in our own conversation and jokes and disputes, so you'll understand exactly what that week was to us, when I say that it was a slice out of the old days.

"It was better in some ways, however. The future is not such a distressingly unknown quantity as it was then. We don't have to say, 'Let X (a very slim X at that) equal Jack's chances, and minus Y equal Joyce's.' If we could only determine the value of the chances of Mary, we'd soon know the 'length of the whole fish.' 'Member how you moiled and toiled over that old fish problem in Ray's Algebra, to help me to understand it?

"Well, I am the puzzling element in the Ware family's equation. It's our problem to find the extent of my resources. I was dreadfully discouraged before Christmas, when every application I sent out was turned down. It seemed to me that if I had one more disappointment I couldn't possibly bear it. But Joyce has almost persuaded me

to give up the quest for awhile, at least until spring. I am a year younger than she was when she went away from home, and she thinks that I owe it to mamma to stay with her till I am out of my teens. Mamma hasn't been very well lately. Sometimes I think I could have a very pleasant winter here after all, if I'd just make up my mind to settle down and forget my ambitions. There are mild social possibilities in two of the new families who moved here last fall, and Pink Upham does everything he can think of to make it pleasant. We are going skating to-night, and have a big bonfire on the bank. To-morrow, being New Year's Day, consequently a holiday for him, we are to have a long sleigh-ride over to Hemlock Ridge. The ladies of some lodge in the settlement over there are to serve a turkey dinner in the school-house.

"I have begun this letter backwards. What I set out to do, first and foremost, was to thank you for the lovely book which you sent with your Yuletide greeting. I read over half of it aloud last night after our Christmas guests departed, and was glad that we had such an interesting story. It kept us from getting doleful.

"By the way, the heroine is called Bonnie, after the song, *Bonnie Eloise*. And Joyce said that Eu-

genia told her that there is an American girl visiting the doctor's family near your construction camp, whom you refer to in your letters as Bonnie Eloise. Eugenia says that she plays the guitar and sings duets with you, and is altogether charming. Is Eloise her real name, or do you call her that because she is bonny like the girl in the book? And does she sing as well as Lloyd Sherman? Do tell us about her the next time you write! Your sayings and doings would interest us even if we were looping the loop socially in gay Gotham and dwelt continually 'in the midst of alarms.' But in the Selkirkian stillness of these solitudes our interest in our friends deepens into something amazing.

"Mamma says to tell you that we all spoke of you and quoted you many times this week, and wished daily that you were with us. She sends her love and will write as soon as she is able. With all good wishes for your New Year from each of us, Yours, downcast but still inflexible,

"MARY."

Phil answered this letter the day it was received, replying to her question about Eloise in a joking postscript, as if wishing to convey the impression that his interest in her was less than Mary's.

"I forgot to say that Eloise is a name I have bestowed upon the young lady who is visiting the Whites, in exchange for the compliment of her having given my name to her dog. He is a lank, sneaking greyhound which never leaves her side, and was called merely Señor, when she brought him to Mexico. Now she has added Tremonti to his title. She herself is baptized Eliza. She is a pretty, kittenish little thing, deathly afraid of cock-roaches and caterpillars, devoted to frills and fetching furbelows, and fond of taking picturesque poses in the moonlight with the slinky greyhound. No, her voice is not to be compared to the Little Colonel's, but it is sweet and sympathetic, very effective in ballads and simple things. We sing together whenever I happen to drop in at the doctor's, which is several times a week, and I am indebted to her for many pleasant hours, which are doubly appreciated in this desert waste of a place.

"Now will you answer a few questions for me? Who is this Pink Upham who is 'doing everything to make the winter pleasant' for you? What is his age, his business and his ultimate aim in life? Is he the only available escort to all the social functions of Lone-Rock? You never mention any other. Don't forget what I told you when I said good-

bye in Bauer, and *don't forget what you promised me then.*"

Mary was in the kitchen when that letter was brought in to her. She had just slipped a pan of gingersnaps into the oven, and was rolling out the remainder of the dough to fill another pan. Not even stopping to wipe her floury hands, she walked over to the window, tore open the envelope and began to read. When she came to the end of the postscript she stood gazing out of the window at the back fence, half buried in the drifted snow. What she saw was not the old fence, however. She was gazing back into a sunny April morning in the hills of Texas. She was standing by a kitchen window there, also, but that one was open, and looked out upon a meadow of blue-bonnets, as blue as the sea. And outside, looking in at her, with his arms crossed on the window-sill, was Phil. There was no need for him to write in that postscript, "Don't forget what I told you when I said good-bye in Bauer." She had recalled it so many times in the nine months that had passed since then, that she could repeat every word.

It still seemed just as remarkable now as it had

then that he should have asked her to promise to let him know if anybody ever came along trying to persuade her "to join him on a new trail," or that he should have said that he wanted "a hand in choosing the right man," and above all that he should have added solemnly, "I have never yet seen anybody whom I considered good enough for little Mary Ware."

If Mary could have known what picture rose up before Phil's eyes as he wrote that postscript, she would have been unspeakably happy. She had so many mortifying remembrances of times when he had caught her looking her very worst, when he had come upon her just emerging from some accident that had left her drenched or smoked or bedraggled, mud-spattered, ink-stained or dust-covered. Holland's recent reminiscences had deepened her impression that she must have been in a wrecked condition half her time, for he had kept the family laughing all one evening, recalling various plights he had rescued her from.

It would have been most soul-satisfying to her could she have known that Phil thought of her oftenest as he had last seen her, standing at the gate in a white and pink dress, fresh as a spring blossom, her sweet sincere eyes looking gravely

into his as he insisted on a promise, but her dear little mouth smiling mischievously as she vowed, "I'll keep my word. Honest, I will!"

As she recalled that promise now, her face dimpled again as it had then over the absurdity of such a thing. "The idea of Phil's thinking that Pink Upham is anybody to be considered seriously!" she exclaimed, as she recalled his uncouth laugh, his barbaric taste in dress, his provincial little habits and mannerisms, which in the parlance of the Warwick Hall girls, would have stamped him "dead common" according to their standards. She was still looking dreamily out into the snowy yard when Mrs. Ware came to the door to inquire with an anxious sniff,

"Mary, isn't something burning?"

Suddenly recalled to herself, Mary sprang to open the oven door, wailing, "My cookies, oh, my cookies! Burnt to a crisp! And the gingerbread man I promised to little Don Moredock, black as a cinder! I'll have to make him another one, but there won't be time to stick in all the beautiful clove buttons that I had this one's suit trimmed with. His coat was like Old Grimes', 'all buttoned down before.' It was Phil's letter that caused the wreck," she explained to her mother, as she emp-

tied the burnt cakes into the fire. "There it is on the table."

Phil's letters were family property.—Mrs. Ware carried it off to read, and Mary, taking another pan, proceeded to shape another gingerbread man. As she did so, her thoughts went from it to little Don Moredock for whom it was intended, and then to Pink Upham, who had been the devoted slave of the little fellow with the broken leg ever since the accident occurred. As she recalled Pink's patience and gentleness with the child, she wondered just what sort of an impression he would make on Phil. The more she pondered the more certain she was that Phil would see him through Jack's eyes and little Don's, rather than through hers. And somehow, thinking that, she began to get a different view of him herself.

It was nearly sundown before she found time to run over to the Moredocks' with the gingerbread man, and tell Don the story which it was intended to illustrate. He had never heard it before, and insisted upon her repeating it over and over. He kept her much later than she had intended to stay, and a young moon was shining on the snow when she started home again. Pink Upham, stopping on his way home to supper to leave a feather whirli-

gig he had made for Don, met her going out of the gate as he went in.

Two minutes later he had caught up with her, and was walking along beside her. There was to be a Valentine party at Sara Downs on the fourteenth, he told her. A fancy dress affair. He wanted her to go with him, as his valentine. Now if it had not been for Phil's letter, Mary's eyes might not have been opened quite so soon to the fact that Pink regarded her as the right girl, no matter what she thought of him. But all at once she realized that he was looking down at her as no one had ever looked before. There was something in his glance like the dumb wistfulness that makes a hunting dog's eyes so pathetic, and she felt a little shiver run over her. She didn't want him to care like *that!* It was perfectly thrilling to feel that she had aroused a deep regard in any one's heart, but, oh, *why* did it have to be some one who fell so short of her standard of what a true prince must measure up to?

Embarrassed and troubled, she hurried away from him as soon as they reached the gate. The lamps were lighted and supper was ready when she went into the house. She began talking the moment she sat down at the table, but somehow she

could not put Pink out of her mind. She kept seeing him as he had stood there at the gate in the snow with the young moon lighting it up. She knew that he had stood and watched her pass up the path and into the house, for she had stolen a hasty glance over her shoulder as she opened the door, and the tall, dark figure was still there.

She talked vivaciously of many things: of little Don's pleasure in her gift, of her fall on the ice on the way over, of Sara Downs' Valentine party, of Phil's letter. When the last subject was mentioned Mrs. Ware remarked, "That snap-shot of 'Eloise' shows her to be a very pretty girl, I think."

"Snap-shot of Eloise!" echoed Mary blankly. "I didn't see it. Where is it?"

"In the envelope. I didn't see it either, until I started to shove the folded sheet back into it. Something inside prevented its going more than half way, and I found it was the little unmounted picture curled up inside. It's on the mantel. Norman, get it for your sister, please."

Mary held the picture under the lamp for a careful scrutiny. So that was Eloise. A slim, graceful girl posing in a hammock, with one hand resting on the guitar in her lap, the other on the head of Señor Tremonti. Her face was in shadow, but she

looked dangerously attractive to Mary, who spoke her opinion openly.

"She's an appealing little thing, the clinging-vine sort. If Phil saw her only in the daylight and called her plain Eliza, and could remember that she's a little 'fraid cat whose chief interest in life is frills and fetching furbelows, he wouldn't be in any danger. But you see, he hasn't any of his kind of girls down there — I mean like the Little Colonel and Betty and Gay, and the moonlight and musical evenings will give her a sort of glamor that'll make her seem different, just as calling her Eloise makes her seem more romantic than when he says Eliza."

"Don't you worry," laughed Jack. "Phil is old enough to look out for himself, and to know what he wants. You can trust him to pick out the kind of wife that suits him, better than you could do it for him."

"But I don't want him to be satisfied with that kind after all the lovely girls he's known," grumbled Mary, putting the picture aside and going on with her supper. Her motherly concern was even greater over this situation than it had been when she thought of him as "doomed to carry a secret sorrow to his grave." She pinned the picture of

Eloise to the frame of her mirror when she went to her room that night, and studied it while she slowly brushed her hair.

Once she paused with brush in air as a comforting thought suddenly occurred to her. "Why, I'm in the same position that Phil is. Pink doesn't measure up to my highest ideal of a man any more than Eliza measures up to Lloyd, but he's my chief source of amusement here, just as she is Phil's there. Maybe she lets him see that she's fond of his company and all that, and he hates to hurt her feelings as I hate to hurt Pink's. I'll intimate as much in my letter when I answer his questions, if I can think of the right way to do it."

It was because she could not find the right words to express these sentiments that she delayed answering from day to day, then other things crowded it out of her mind. The Valentine party required that much time and thought be spent on the costumes, and she helped Jack with his. He went as a comic Valentine. Pink begged her to dress as the Queen of Hearts, and she was almost persuaded to do so, thinking that would be the easiest of costumes to prepare, till she guessed from something he let fall that he intended to personate the King himself. Then nothing would have induced her to

do it. She knew it would give occasion for the coupling of their names together in the familiar and teasing way they have in little country towns.

So she dressed as an old-fashioned lace-paper valentine. The dress was made of a much-mended lace curtain. The front of the bodice had two square lapels wired at the edges, so that they could be folded together like the front of a real valentine, or opened back like shutters to show on her breast a panel of pale blue satin, on which was outlined two white doves perched above a great red heart. Mrs. Ware painted it, and although it may sound queer in the description, it was in reality a very pretty costume, and the touch of color made it so becoming that Mary's cheeks glowed with pleasure many times during the evening at the comments she overheard on all sides.

Pink's eyes followed her admiringly everywhere she went, but he had little to say to her, except once, as he finished singing a song which Sara Downs had begged for, he leaned over and whispered significantly, "That's *your* song."

It was Kathleen Mavourneen, and she wondered why he called it hers. On the way home he was so strangely silent that Mary wondered what was the matter. She rattled along, talking with even

more vivacity than usual, to cover his silence, and walked fast to keep within speaking distance of several others who were going down their road. They all walked Indian file, the path beaten through the snow was so narrow. Jack had started much earlier, as he was taking old Captain Boane's niece home. The cottage was in sight when the others turned off into another road, and Pink and Mary were left crunching through the snow alone.

Then Pink suddenly found his voice. Clearing his throat he began diffidently, "Mary, I want to ask you something. I want to ask a favor of you."

His tone was so ominous that Mary's heart gave a thump like a startled rabbit's.

"I wish you wouldn't call me 'Pink' like everybody else does. I wish you'd call me a name that no one would use but you. Just when we're by ourselves, you know. I wouldn't want you to any other time. I'd love for you to have your own special name for me just as I have for you."

"What's that?" asked Mary, crunching steadily on ahead, determined to laugh him out of his serious tone if possible. "What name do you have for me? 'Polly-put-the-kettle-on?' That's my usual nickname. It used to be 'Mother-bunch' and 'Gordo' when I was little and fat."

"I didn't mean a nickname," answered Pink a little stiffly. He was in no humor for joking, and he rather resented her light reply. Her rapid pace had quickened almost into a dog-trot. With a few long strides he put himself even with her, walking along in the deep snow beside the narrow path. Evidently he felt the witchery of the still winter night, with the moonlight silvering the snowy world around them, even if Mary did not. For in spite of the brisk, business-like pace she set, he said presently:

"I've been making up my mind all evening to tell you this on my way home. You've never seemed like an ordinary girl to me. You're so much nicer in every way, that long ago I gave you a name that I always call you to myself. And I wanted to ask you if you wouldn't do the same for me. Of course I couldn't expect you to give me the same sort of a name that I have for you, but I'd be content if you'd just call me by my first name, *Philip.*"

"*Philip!*" repeated Mary blankly, turning short in the narrow path to stare at him. "Why, I didn't know that that was *your* name. It's a name that has always seemed to belong especially to just one person in the world. I never dreamed that it

was *your* name. Somehow I had the impression that that first P in it stood for Peter."

"I don't know why," answered Pink in a hurt tone. "I was named for my grandfather, Philip Pinckney, so I don't see why I haven't as good a right to it as any one."

"Oh, of course you have," cried Mary. "I was just surprised, that's all. It's only that I've always regarded it as the especial property of one of my very best friends, I suppose."

"Well, I rather hoped that you counted *me* as one of your very best friends," was the gloomy response. To Mary's unspeakable relief Jack came swinging up behind them just then with some jolly remark that saved her the necessity of an answer, and the good nights were spoken without any further reference to personal matters.

It was so late that she undressed as quickly and quietly as she could, in order not to awaken her mother in the next room. As she did so she kept thinking, "I wonder what it is he always calls me to himself? I'd give a fortune to know. But I suppose I never will find out, for I'm sure that I hurt his feelings saying what I did about Phil's name. Why, I could no more call him Philip than I could call him *mother!* Those names belong so

entirely to the people I've always given them to."

It was not until she had been tucked warmly in bed for some time, with her eyes closed, that she thought of something which made her sit bolt upright, regardless of the icy wind blowing in through her open windows.

"*Philip and Mary on a shilling!* Merciful heavens!" she exclaimed in a whisper. "It can't be that that old shilling that I drew out of Eugenia's bride-cake really has any power to influence my destiny!"

There was something vaguely alarming in the knowledge that Pink claimed the name of Philip. Long ago Mary had taken the story of *The Three Weavers* to heart, and vowed that no one could be her prince who did not fit her ideals "as the falcon's feathers fit the falcon." Now she exclaimed almost savagely to herself:

"Why, Pink Upham no more measures up to my ideals than, than — *anything!* It's ridiculous to believe that an old shilling could influence my destiny that way. It can't! It *sha'n't!* I simply won't let it!"

Then, as she lay back on her pillow again and pulled the blankets over her shivering shoulders, she thought drearily, "But, oh, dear, this is going

to interfere with my only good times! Whenever he is nice to me I'll think of that dreadful old shilling in spite of myself. I wish I could go away from Lone-Rock this very week!"

CHAPTER VI

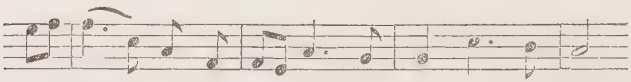
TOLD IN LETTERS

On the way to the post-office next morning, Mary determined that if she should meet Pink there, as she sometimes did, not even the flicker of an eyelash should show that she remembered last night's conversation. But when she saw the back of a familiar fur overcoat through the post-office window, she felt the color rush into her face.

When she went in, not only was she conscious from his greeting that *he* remembered, but the look in his eyes said as plainly as words that the name which he kept for her alone had risen almost to his lips. It made her uncomfortable, but she was burning with curiosity to know what that name could be.

There were several people in the line ahead of her, and Pink emptied his locked box before her turn came at the window. She knew that he was waiting outside the door for her, so, when she passed him, she was purposely absorbed in opening

the only letter which had fallen to her share. It was a tough-fibred envelope, hard to tear, and her heavily gloved hands made clumsy work of it. Finally she thrust a forefinger under the flap and wrenched it apart. A ragged scrap of yellowed paper fluttered out on to the step. Pink stooped and handed it to her.

"Why, how queer! That's all there is in the envelope," she exclaimed, shaking it, then holding out the jagged bit of paper so that Pink could examine it with her. It was only a scrap torn from a sheet of music, or some old song-book. They read the bars together:

If Mary had not been so busy puzzling over why it had been sent, she would have seen a dull red creep into Pink's face, as he recognized it as a line from *Kathleen Mavourneen,* the song which he told Mary the night before he always regarded as hers.

Suddenly she laughed. "Of course! I see it now! It's just Phil's cute way of reminding me that I owe him a letter. Once, when Jack had not

written for months, Phil called his attention to the silence by sending a postal with just a big question mark on it. But this is a much brighter way."

"Yes, I see a few things too," said Pink stiffly. "I'd forgotten that that fellow down in Mexico is named Philip. So *he's* the only person in the world you consider the name belongs to — and he calls you — *that!*"

His finger pointed to the last five words under the bar of music.

"He's the only one I've ever known by that name," began Mary, surprised by the unaccountable change in his manner, and unaware that it was a swift flash of jealousy which caused it. To her amazement he turned abruptly and walked away without even a curt "good morning."

She glanced after him in surprise, wondering at his abrupt leave-taking. He was unmistakably offended about something. Sara Downs had told her more than once that he was the most foolishly sensitive person she had ever known, continually getting his feelings hurt over nothing, but this was the first time Mary had ever had an exhibition of his sensitiveness. Conscious that she had done nothing at which a reasonable person could take offence, she looked after him with a desire to shake

him for such childishness. Then with a shrug of her shoulders she turned and started homeward.

"That was such a bright, original way for Phil to remind me," she thought, glancing again at the scrap of music. "And it is so absolutely silly of Pink to say in such a tragic tone, 'And he called you *that!*' There is nothing more personal in Phil's saying 'thou voice of my heart' than there would be in his calling me 'Old Dog Tray' or a scrap of any other song. He's always roaring questions at people in the shape of bits of music. But, of course, Pink doesn't know that," she added a moment afterward, wanting to be perfectly honest in her judgment of him. "But even if he doesn't, it's none of his business what anybody calls me."

The episode, trifling as it was, made a difference in the answer that she sent to Phil. Instead of trying to reply to his questions seriously, as she had intended to do, she was so disdainful of Pink's behavior that she concluded to ignore all mention of him. As she passed the Moredock house, a phonograph, playing away inside for the amusement of little Don, brayed out a rag-time refrain: "I want what I want, *when I want it!*"

Suddenly the inspiration seized her to answer

Phil's reminder of her silence in his own way. She would make a medley of fragments of songs. How to begin it puzzled her, for the only song she could think of, containing his name, was "Philip, my King," and she dismissed that immediately, as impossible. All the way home she whistled under her breath bits of old melodies, one suggesting another, until she had a long list, and she made haste to write them down, for fear she might forget. From the back of an old dog-eared guitar instructor, which she found in the book-case, she copied many titles of ballads, and among them came across the line, "Friend of my soul, the goblet sip." It was one which she knew Phil was familiar with, for she remembered having heard him sing it at the Wigwam. So she promptly chose the first four words as the ones with which to commence. The first part of the letter ran somewhat after this fashion:

"LONE-ROCK (NOT) BY THE SEA.

"'FRIEND OF MY SOUL':—'The day is cold and dark and dreary.' 'In the gloaming,' 'The swallows homeward fly.' 'The daily question is,' 'What's this dull town to me?' 'Tell me not in mournful numbers' that 'I'd better bide a wee.'

'Oh, 'tis not true!' 'I hear the angel voices calling' 'Where the sun shines bright on my old Kentucky home,' and 'I want what I want *when I want it.*'"

It took an entire evening to evolve a letter which suited her, and although it was utter foolishness, she managed to give the news and to convey through the cleverly combined titles the fact that she was still struggling to get away from Lone-Rock, that there was no "swain amang the train" to keep her from "going back to Dixie" "in the sweet bye and bye." She also found a way to make complimentary mention of Bonnie Eloise.

That was the last evening, however, which she devoted to trivial things for many weeks. For Jack came home next noon greatly troubled over conditions at the office. The bookkeeper was down with pneumonia. There was no one who could step into his place but Jack, and he already had his hands full with his own responsibilities and duties.

"It is the correspondence which worries me most," he said. "We haven't had enough of that kind of work, so far, to justify us hiring a stenographer, but some days the mail is so heavy that it keeps me pounding on the typewriter an hour or

more. Now, Mary, if you had only added shorthand to your many accomplishments, there'd be a fine chance for you to help hold the fort till Bailey gets well."

"I can help do it, anyhow," she declared promptly. "I know how business letters ought to sound — 'Yours of recent date' and 'enclosed herewith please find' and all that sort of thing. I can scratch off in pencil a sort of outline of what you want said, and then take my time copying it on the machine."

Past experience had taught the family that whenever Mary attempted anything with the eagerness with which she proposed this plan, she always carried it through triumphantly, and Jack's face showed his relief as he promptly accepted her offer.

"No use for you to come down this afternoon," he said. "I'll be too busy looking after other things to give any time to letters."

"But I can be making the acquaintance of the machine," answered Mary. "Madam Chartley's stenographer learned to run hers simply by studying the book of instructions. And if it won't bother you to hear me clicking away I'll put in the whole afternoon practising."

So when Jack went back to the office, Mary went with him, happy and excited over this unexpected entrance into the world of Business.

"Who knows but what this may be a stepping-stone into a successful career?" she exclaimed. "Why didn't I think of applying to you for a position in the very beginning? It would have saved a world of worry and disappointment, and a small fortune in postage stamps."

He had time for only a short explanation of the machine before he was called away, but the book of instructions was clear and concise. She studied the illustrations and diagrams for awhile with her whole attention concentrated on them. Accustomed to picking up new crochet stitches and following intricate patterns from printed directions, it was an easy matter for her to master the intricacies of the new machine. Several times she stopped Jack in passing to ask him a question about some movement or adjustment, but in the main she experimented until she could answer her own questions.

In a little while she could shift the ribbon or flip a sheet of paper in and out with the ease of an expert. Then she began studying the keyboard, to learn the position of the letters, and after that

"SEVERAL TIMES SHE STOPPED JACK IN PASSING TO ASK HIM A QUESTION."

it was only a question of practice to gain speed. Fingers that had learned nimbleness and accuracy of touch in other fields, did not lag long here. Hour after hour she sat at the machine, practising finger exercises as patiently as if the keys were the ivories of a grand piano.

The next letter which she sent to Phil, some days later, was such a contrast to the musical medley that it did not seem possible that they had been written by the same person.

"LONE-ROCK, ARIZONA, April 2d.

"MR. PHILIP TREMONT,

"Necaxa, Mexico.

"DEAR SIR: Your favor of the 24th ult. duly received and contents noted. I am much gratified with your reference to my last epistle, and your hearty encore, but I can give no more muscial monologues at present. I am engaged as Corresponding Secretary in the office of the Lone-Rock Mining Company. Corresponding Secretary may be too grand a name to give my humble position, but it comes nearer to describing it than any that I can think of.

"First I came in just to help Jack out, while his chief was away and the bookkeeper ill. I helped

him with the correspondence and all sorts of odds and ends, and between times practised typewriting, till now I can take dictation on the machine when he speaks at a moderately slow pace.

"Yesterday he received a telegram calling him East to a special directors' meeting, to report on something unexpected that has recently developed out here. So I'm to stay on at the office while he is gone, *on a salary!* A very modest one it is to be sure, but it is bliss to feel that at last I have found a paying position, no matter how small it is. Isn't it queer? Lone-Rock is the last place on the planet where a girl like me would expect to find anything of the sort to do. Mr. Headley, the chief, is back, of course, or Jack couldn't leave, and I'm watching my opportunity to make myself so useful around the office that they'll all wonder how they ever 'kept house' so long without me.

"Mr. Bailey's pneumonia has been blessed to me if not to him, for it has broken the spell, or hoo-doo, or whatever it was that thwarted all my efforts. Fortune's 'turn' is slowly approaching. Let it come when it will I can now meet it like the wingèd spur of me ancestors, with the cry 'Ready! Aye, ready!'

"Trusting that this explanation is satisfactory,

and that we may be favored by a reply at your earliest convenience, I have the honor to remain,

"Yours very truly,

"M. WARE.

"(P. S. I must ask you to observe the very tasty manner in which this is typed.)"

The next letter from Mary to Phil was hastily scribbled in pencil.

"DEAR PHIL: — Jack came home yesterday with a bit of news for the Ware family, which set it into a wild commotion, to say the least. Nobody but the family is to know it for awhile, but I am going to tell you because you're sort of 'next of kin.' Jack said I might, but you mustn't send your congratulations until you are officially notified.

"When Jack went East to that directors' meeting he stopped over Sunday in Lloydboro Valley, and Betty was home from Warwick Hall on her Easter vacation, and he saw her again, and well — *they're engaged!* Isn't it perfectly lovely? I've known for a long time that they have been corresponding. They began it over *me* while I was at Warwick Hall. It will probably be a long time

before they are married. Betty will finish teaching this term at Warwick Hall and then go back to Locust for awhile. Jack is to be promoted to Mr. Headley's place next fall, and I *think* the grand event will take place the following spring, a year from now.

"You know Betty, and what a perfectly darling saint she is, so I needn't tell you how the entire family rejoices over Jack's good fortune, although we *do* think too, that she is equally fortunate to have Jack and — *us*. Don't you?"

It was May before another letter found its way from Lone-Rock to the little station up in the mountains of Mexico, to which Phil sent a daily messenger on mule-back for his mail. Mary wrote it in the office while waiting for Jack to come in again and go on with his dictation. It had been interrupted in the middle by some outside matter which called him away from his desk for nearly an hour.

"No," she began, "I must confess that it isn't lack of time which has kept me so long from answering your last letter, but merely lack of news. Mr. Bailey is back at his post now as good as new after his spell of pneumonia. I had a busy month

while he was out, but now there isn't enough for me to do to justify their keeping me more than an hour or so each morning.

"I am glad to have that much of a position however, for it adds a trifle every week to my bank account, and breaks into the monotony of the days more than you can imagine. I come down just after the morning train gets in and stay long enough to attend to the day's correspondence. Usually it takes about an hour.

"I haven't written for some time because there was nothing to tell. Of course the mountains are beautiful in this perfect May weather, but you wouldn't want to read pages of description. There has been nothing going on socially since the Valentine party. Pink Upham used to stir up things quite often, but he seems to be very much absorbed in his business lately, and I rarely see him. Occasionally I go for a tramp up the mountains with Norman and Billy, and we went fishing twice last week, and cooked our lunch on the creek bank.

"But if we are not doing things ourselves we are enjoying the activities of our friends. Have I ever told you that Lieutenant Boglin is now in the Philippines? He sent me a bunch of photographs from there last week that make me wild to see the

place. And Roberta is abroad with her family and is having adventures galore in London.

"Gay is having all sorts of good times at the post, and even old Mr. and Mrs. Barnaby up in Bauer are planning for a trip to the Pacific coast.

"Joyce and Miss Henrietta have shut up the studio for a few weeks, and have gone to Tours to join Cousin Kate and sketch awhile in that lovely chateau region. And that reminds me of the question you asked in your last letter about Jules Ciseaux. I wonder how you happened to think of him. He came to America last year just as he had expected to do, but he got no farther than New York. Joyce told us all about him when she was home last Christmas. She says he has grown up to be a wonderfully interesting young fellow, slim and dark, with a most distinguished air and courtly manner. Something called him back to France before he made his Western trip, and he lamented to her that he could not meet her 'young sister Marie,' whom he 'pictured to be most charming and accomplished.' But I suppose it's destined that we shall never see each other, for he's married now to a little artist whom he met in Paris when he was studying there. He came across her again in New York, and Joyce says she knows now that that is

what took him back again so suddenly to Paris. The girl was just starting, and he took passage on the same steamer. They are living now in the home of his ancestors behind the great Gate of the Giant Scissors, and Joyce was entertained there at dinner one night, and was charmed with young Mrs. Jules. She says they are as happy as two Babes in Candy-land.

"Oh, I've just thought — I *am* doing something, although it may not appeal to your masculine mind as anything worth mentioning. Mamma and I are both at work on some beautiful embroidery for Betty. It is so fine and intricate that we can only do a little at a time, but it is a labor of love, like the touches the old monks used to put on their illuminated missals. Nothing can be too fine and dainty for our dear Betty, and we are counting the months until we can really claim her. Do you suppose you will be back in the States by that time? I truly hope so. In the meantime don't forget your old friends of the Wigwam days, and especially, *this* member of the House of Ware."

CHAPTER VII

A DESERT OF WAITING

It was so still on the porch where Mary and her mother sat sewing that warm May afternoon that they could distinctly hear the Moredock phonograph, playing some new records over and over. One of them was a quick-step that the military band had often played at Fort Sam Houston, and as Mary listened an intolerable longing for stir and excitement took possession of her. She wanted to be back in the midst of people and constantly changing scenes. She felt that she could not endure the deadly monotony of Lone-Rock another day.

Usually she had much to say as they sat and sewed through the long still afternoons, but to-day the music claimed her attention. It was very pleasing at that distance, but it was disquieting in its effect. She dropped her embroidery into her lap and sat looking out at the narrow grass-grown road winding past the house and over the hill, and ending in a narrow mountain path beyond.

"Mamma," she asked suddenly, in one of the pauses of the music, "were any of our ancestors tramps or gypsies? Seems to me they must have been, or I wouldn't feel the 'Call of the Road' so strongly. Don't you feel it? As if it beckons and you *must* break loose and follow, to find what's waiting for you around the next turn?"

Mrs. Ware shook her head. "No," she said slowly. "I'm like the old Israelites. When they came to Elim, with its wells and palm trees, they were glad to camp there indefinitely. This is my Elim."

"I wonder, now," mused Mary, "if they really were satisfied. I don't mean to be irreverent, but only last night I read that verse, *'Whether it were two days or a month or a year that the cloud tarried upon the tabernacle, the Children of Israel abode in their tents and journeyed not.'* And I thought that among so many, there must have been a lot of them who were impatient to get on to their promised land; who fretted and fumed when day after day the pillar of cloud never lifted to lead them on. I'd have been like that. If we could only know how long we have to stay in a place it would make it lots easier. Now, if I had known last fall that eight months would go by and find me still

here in Lone-Rock, I'd have made up my mind to the inevitable and settled down comfortably. It's the dreadful uncertainty that is so hard to bear."

Just then the phonograph started up one of its old records. *"I want what I want when I want it!"* They both looked up and laughed at each other.

"That is the cry of the ages," said Mrs. Ware merrily. "I've no doubt that even the tribes of Israel had some version of that same song, and wailed it often on the march. But their very impatience showed that they were not fit to go on towards their conquest of Canaan."

"Then you think that *I* am not fitted yet to take possession of my Canaan?" Mary asked quickly.

"I don't know, dear," was the hesitating answer, "but I've come to believe that every one who reaches the best that life holds for him reaches it through some Desert of Waiting. You remember that legend of old Camelback Mountain, don't you?"

Mary nodded, and Mrs. Ware quoted softly, "No one fills his crystal vase till he has been pricked by the world's disappointments and bowed by its tasks. . . . Oh, thou vendor of salt, is not any waiting

worth the while, if in the end it give thee wares with which to gain a royal entrance?"

Mary waited a moment, then with an impatient shrug of her shoulders picked up her embroidery hoops again. In her present mood it irritated her to be told that waiting was good for her. The legend itself irritated her. She wondered how any one could find any comfort in it, least of all her mother, whose life had been so largely a desert of hard work and hard times.

Presently, as if in answer to her thought, Mrs. Ware looked up, saying, "You spoke just now of the call of the road. It is strange how strongly I've felt it all afternoon, only my call takes me backward. I've been living over little scenes that I haven't thought of before in years; hearing little things your father said when Joyce and Jack were babies; seeing the neighbors back in Plainsville. Maybe that is one reason I am not impatient to push on any farther into the future. I have such a beautiful Memory Road to travel back over. I'd rather sit and recall the turns in that than wonder what lies on ahead."

"For instance," suggested Mary, and Mrs. Ware immediately began a reminiscence that Mary remembered hearing when a child. But to-day she realized

that there was a difference in the telling. Her mother was not repeating it as she used to do to amuse the children who clamored for tales of Once upon a time. She was speaking as one woman to another, opening a chapter into the inmost history of her heart.

"She recognizes the fact that I'm grown up," Mary thought to herself with satisfaction, and she was conscious that her mother was taking quite as deep a pleasure in this sense of equal understanding and companionship as she.

It was nearly sundown when a slow creaking of wheels and soft thud of hoofs on the grass-grown road called their attention to a short procession of wagons and horsemen, winding along towards the house. A long pine box was in the first wagon, and several families crowded into the others.

"Oh, it's a funeral procession!" whispered Mary, pushing back a little further into the shadow of the vines, so as to be out of sight. "It must be that Mr. Locksley who was killed yesterday over at Hemlock Ridge by a falling tree. Isn't it awful?"

She gave a little shiver and her eyes filled with tears as they rested on the children in the second wagon. There had been a pitiful attempt to honor the dead by following the conventions. The woman

who sat bowed over on the front seat like an image of despair, wore a black veil and cotton gloves; and black sunbonnets, evidently borrowed from grown-up neighbors, covered the flaxen hair of three little girls in pink calico dresses, who nestled against her. There was a band of rusty crape fastened around the gray cow-boy hat that the boy wore.

The pathetic little procession wound on past the house and up the hill, then was lost to sight as it passed into a grove of cedars on the right, behind which lay the lonely cemetery. Only a few times in her life had Mary come this close to death. Now the horror of it seemed to blot out all the brightness of the sweet May day, and the thought of the grief-stricken woman in the wagon cast such a shadow over her that her eyes were full of unshed tears and her hands trembled when she took up her needle again.

"It's so awful!" she exclaimed, when they had passed out of hearing. "They were all over at that dinner at Hemlock Ridge that Pink took me to last winter. I remember Mr. Locksley especially because he was so big and strong-looking, like a young giant, almost. I asked Pink who he was, because I noticed how good he was to his family, carrying the

baby around on one arm and helping his wife unpack baskets with the other. Yesterday morning when he left the house he was just as well and strong as anybody in the world, Captain Doane told me. He went off laughing and joking, and stopped to call back something to his wife about the garden, and two hours later they carried him home — like that! In just an instant the life had been crushed out of him."

Her voice broke and she swallowed hard before she could go on.

"I've always thought death wouldn't be so bad if one could die as dear Beth did, in 'Little Women.' Don't you remember how sweetly and gently she faded away, and so slowly that there was no great shock when the end came? She had time to get used to the idea of going, and to say things that would comfort them after she was gone. But to be snatched away like Mr. Locksley — without a moment's warning — it seems too dreadful! I don't see how God can let such cruel things happen."

"But think, little daughter," urged Mrs. Ware gently, "how much he was spared. No long illness, no racking pain, no lingering with the consciousness that he was a burden to others! There is nothing cruel in that. It's a happy way for the

one who goes, dear, to go suddenly. It is the way of all others I would choose for myself."

"But think of the ones left behind!" said Mary, with a shudder. "I don't see how that poor woman can go on living after having the one she loved best in all the world, torn so suddenly and so utterly out of her life."

"But he isn't, dear!" persisted Mrs. Ware gently. "You do not think because Joyce has gone away to another land, which we have never seen, and an ocean rolls between us, that she is torn out of our lives, do you? She does not know what we are doing, and we cannot follow her through her busy, happy days over there, but we know that she is still ours, that her love flows out to us just the same, that separation cannot make her any less our own, and that she looks forward with us to the happy time when we shall once more be together. That's all that death is, Mary. Just a going away into another country, as Joyce has gone. Only the separation is harder to bear because there can be no letters to bridge the silence. I used to have the same horror of it that you do, but after your father went away I learned to look upon it as God intended we should. Not a horrible doom which must overtake every one of us, but as a beautiful mystery through

which we pass as through an open gate, with glad surprise at the things that shall be made plain to us, and with a great sense of triumph."

As she spoke, the light of the sunset seemed to turn the mountain trail up which she was gazing, into a golden path which led straight up to the City of the Shining Ones, and its radiant glow was reflected in her face. Mary's eyes followed hers. Somehow she felt warmed and comforted by her mother's strong faith, but she said nothing. Only sat and watched with her, the gorgeous colors of the sunset that were transfiguring the gray old mountain.

If there were only some way of recognizing at their beginning, the days which are to be hallowed days in our lives! We know them as such after they have slipped by, and we enshrine them in our memories and go back to live them over, moment by moment. But it is always with the cry, "Oh, if I had only known! If I had only filled them fuller while I had them! If I had not left so much unasked, unsaid!"

Unconscious that this was such a time, Mary sat rocking back and forth in the silence that followed, drifting into vague day dreams, as they watched the changing colors over the western mountain tops.

Then a click of the back gate-latch called them both back to speech, and Norman came around the corner of the house swinging a string of fish. He announced that Billy Downs had helped catch them and was going to stay to supper to help eat them.

Billy usually stayed to supper three or four times a week, and on the nights when he was not there Norman was at his house. The two boys were inseparable, and a pleasant intimacy had grown up between the families. That night as usual, he went home at nine o'clock, but came running back almost immediately, bareheaded and breathless. His mother had been taken suddenly ill. The only doctor in the place had been called to a case on the other side of the mountain, and nobody knew when he would be home. His father and Sara were nearly scared stiff, they were so frightened, and wouldn't Mrs. Ware please come and tell them what to do?

It was the beginning of a long siege, for no nurses were to be had in the little settlement, and there were only the neighbors to turn to in times of stress and trouble. What true neighborliness is, in the fullest meaning of the word, can be known only in pioneer places like this. Hands already full of burdens stretched out to help lighten theirs, and

for awhile one common interest and anxiety made the families of Lone-Rock as one.

But most of the women who came to offer their services had little children at home, or helpless old people who could not be left long alone, or more work than one pair of hands could manage. The only two of experience, not thus burdened, were Mrs. Ware and old Aunt Sally Doane. So they took turns sitting up at nights, and did all they could on alternate days to relieve poor frightened Sara and her anxious father.

Mary, not experienced enough to be left in charge in the sick room, did double duty at home. She did the baking for both families, sometimes three; for many a time old Aunt Sally, too worn out to cook, went home to find a basket full of good things spread out for her and the Captain on the pantry shelves. The Downs family mending went into Mary's basket, and Billy's darns and patches alone were no small matter. Several times a week she slipped over to sweep and dust and do many necessary things that Sara had neither time nor strength to do.

Remembering how valiantly the neighbors had served them during Jack's long illness, Mary gladly did her part, and a very large one towards relieving

the stricken household. When she saw Mr. Downs' anxious face relax, at some evidence of her thoughtfulness, and heard Sara's tearful thanks poured out in a broken voice, she was glad that fate had kept her in Lone-Rock to play the good angel in this emergency. If she had not been at home, Mrs. Ware could not have been free to take charge of the invalid, and it was her skilful nursing, so the doctor said, which would pull her through the crisis if anything could.

After the first week, Mrs. Ware came home only in the afternoon each day, to sleep. While she was doing that, Mary tiptoed softly around the house till her tasks were done, careful not to disturb the rest that was so precious and so necessary. Then she took her mending basket out on the front porch, where she could meet any chance comers before they could knock, or could chase away the insistent roosters who tantalizingly chose that corner of the yard to come to when they felt impelled to crow.

It was hard to sit there alone through the long still afternoons while her mother slept. There were a hundred things she wanted to talk about, so many questions she wanted to ask, so many little matters on which she needed advice. There was not even the Moredock phonograph to listen to

now, for it had not been wound up since the beginning of Mrs. Downs' illness, lest its playing disturb her. All she could do was to sit and stitch as patiently as she could, till she heard the bedroom door open, and then fly to make her mother a cup of tea and have a tempting little supper ready for her when she should come out, dressed and ready to go back to another exhausting vigil.

The few minutes while Mrs. Ware sat enjoying the dainty meal were the best in the day for Mary, for she poured out her pent-up questions and speeches, reported all that had gone on since the last time she sat there, and crowded into that brief space as much of Jack's sayings and Norman's doings as she could possibly remember.

"Oh, it'll be so good to have you home again to stay!" she would say every time when Mrs. Ware rose to start back, ending her good-bye embrace with a tight squeeze. "I miss you so I can hardly stand it. The house is so still when you are gone, that if a fly happens to get in its buzz sounds like a roar. You can't imagine how deathly still it is."

"Oh, yes, I can!" laughed Mrs. Ware. "I've been left alone myself. I don't need to imagine. I've experienced it."

Mary hung over the gate to which she had fol-

lowed her mother, and looked after her down the road, thinking, "That never occurred to me before. Of course, if I miss her as I do, quiet as she is, she would miss a rattletybang person like me twice as much. I had never thought of *her* getting lonely, but she'd be bound to if I went away. How'd I feel if she'd gone with Joyce and I had to stay here day after day alone, and know that I'd never have her again except on flying visits, and that she was wrapped up in all sorts of interests that I could never have a part in?"

All that evening she thought about it, and all next morning; and when Mrs. Ware came home in the afternoon she met her with a serious question:

"Mamma, when I'm away from home and you're here by yourself, do you miss me as much as I do you?"

"Oh, a thousand times more!" was the quick answer.

"Then I've made up my mind. Promised Land or no Promised Land, I'm not going away to stay until Jack brings Betty here to take my place."

Taken by surprise, the look which illuminated Mrs. Ware's face for a moment showed more plainly than she had intended Mary to know, how

much it had cost her to consent to her going away. After that if there were times when Mary was tempted to pity herself and look upon that decision as a great sacrifice, one thought of her mother's happy face and the glad little cry that had welcomed her announcement, immediately dispelled any martyr-like feeling.

"Such good news rests me more than any amount of sleep can do," declared Mrs. Ware, as she slipped into her kimono and drew down the window shades. "You don't know how the dread of having to give you up has hung over me. Every time that you've gone to the post-office since last October I've been afraid to see you come home — afraid that you were bringing some summons that would take you away."

"Why, mamma!" cried Mary, surprised to see that there were tears in her eyes, "I didn't dream that you felt *that* way about it. Why didn't you tell me?"

"Because I knew that you'd stay if I asked it, and I *couldn't* block the road in which you were sure you would find your highest good, just for my own selfish pleasure. Oh, you don't know," she added, with a wistfulness which brought a choke to Mary's throat, "what a comfort you've been

to me, ever since the day you came back from school, after Jack's accident. You've always been a comfort — but since that time it's been in a different way. I've *leaned* on you so!"

Deeply touched past all words, Mary's only answer was a kiss and an impulsive hug, before she turned away to hide her happy tears. All afternoon as she sat and sewed, the words sang themselves over and over in her heart: "You've always been a comfort," and she began planning many things to keep them true. She would do something to stir up a social spirit among her mother's small circle of friends; start a club, perhaps, have readings and teas and old-fashioned quilting bees; even a masquerade party now and then. *Anything* to give an air of gaiety to the colorless monotony of the workaday life of Lone-Rock. So with her energies turned into a new channel she at once set to work vigorously mapping out a campaign to be put into effect as soon as Mrs. Downs should be once more on her feet.

It was a happy day when Mrs. Ware came home saying that her services were no longer needed. The family could manage without her, now that a sister had come up from Phœnix to help the invalid through her convalescence.

"It is high time! You are worn out!" said Jack, scanning her face anxiously.

It was pale and drawn, and after a quick scrutiny he rose and followed her into the next room, saying in a low tone, "Mother, I believe you've been having another one of those attacks. Have you?"

"Just a slight one, last night," she confessed. "But it was soon over."

He closed the door behind him, but low as the question had been, Mary's quick ears caught both it and the answer, and she pounced upon him the moment he reappeared, demanding to know what they were talking about. He explained in an undertone, although he had again closed the door behind him when he came back to the dining-room.

"That winter you were at Warwick Hall she had several queer spells with her heart. The pain was dreadful for awhile, but the doctor soon relieved it, and she made me promise not to tell you girls. She said she had been over-exerting herself. That was all. It was that time the Fitchs' house caught fire while they were away from home. She saw it first and ran to give the alarm and help save things, and after it was all over she had a collapse. I made her promise just now that she'd go to bed

and stay there till she is thoroughly rested. She's seen Doctor Bates. He gave her the same remedies she had before, and she insists she's entirely over it now."

With a vague fear clutching at her, Mary started towards her mother's room, but Jack stopped her. "You mustn't go in there looking like a scared rabbit. It will do her more harm than good to let her know that you've found out about it. And really, I don't think there's any cause for alarm, now that the attack is safely over. She responds so quickly to the remedies that she'll soon be all right again. But she *must* take things easy for awhile."

All the rest of that day Mary was troubled and uneasy, notwithstanding the fact that her mother dressed and came out to the supper-table, seemingly as well as usual. Twice in the night Mary wakened with a frightened start, thinking some one had called her, and, raising herself on her elbow, lay listening for some sound from the next room. Once she stepped out of bed and stole noiselessly to the door to look in at her. The late moon, streaming across the floor, showed Mrs. Ware peacefully sleeping, and Mary crept back, relieved and thankful.

CHAPTER VIII

A GREAT SORROW

NORMAN cut his foot the following day, which was Saturday; not seriously, yet deep enough to need a couple of stitches taken in it, and to necessitate the wearing of a bandage instead of a shoe for awhile. Sunday morning, by the aid of a broom stick, he hopped out to the hammock in the shady side yard, and proceeded to enjoy to the fullest his disabled condition. For some reason there was no service in the little school-house which usually took the place of a chapel on the Sabbath, and he openly rejoiced that his family would be free to minister to his comfort and entertainment all day long.

The hammock hung so near the side window of the kitchen that he could look in and see Mary and his mother washing up the breakfast china in their deft, dainty way. Jack was doing the morning chores usually allotted to his younger brother. It was with a sense of luxurious ease that Norman lolled in the hammock, watching Jack bring in

wood and water, carry out ashes and sweep the porch. In his rôle of invalid he felt privileged to ask to be waited upon at intervals, also to demand his favorite dessert for dinner. He did this through the kitchen window, taking part in the conversation which went on as a brisk accompaniment to the quick movements of busy hands.

It was a perfect June day, the kind that makes one feel that with a sky so fair and an earth so sweet life is too full to ask anything more of heaven. Time and again in the pauses that fell between their remarks, Mary's voice jubilantly broke out in the refrain of an old hymn that they all loved: "Happy day, oh, happy day!" And when Jack's deep bass out on the porch and Mrs. Ware's sweet alto in the pantry took up the words to the accompaniment of swishing broom and clattering cups, Norman hummed them too, like a big, contented bumblebee in a field of clover.

Years afterward Mary used to look back to that day and fondly re-live every hour of it. Somehow every little incident stood out so vividly that she could recall even the feeling of unusual well-being and contentment which seemed to imbue them all.

They had spread the table out under the trees at Norman's insistence, and she had only to close

her eyes to recall how each one looked as they gathered around it. She could remember even the pearl gray tie that Jack wore, and the way Norman's hair curled in little rings around his forehead. And she could see her mother's quick smile of appreciation when Jack slipped a cushion into her chair, and her affectionate glance when Norman reached out and fingered a fold of her white dress. Both the boys liked to see her in white, and never failed to comment on it admiringly when she put it on to please them.

All afternoon they stayed out-doors, part of the time reading aloud in turn; and that evening in the afterglow, when the western mountain tops were turning from gold to rose and pearl and purple, they sat out on the front porch watching the glory fade, and ending the day with Jack's favorite song, "Pilgrims of the Night."

And the reason that this day stood out so vividly from all the others in her life was because it was the last day that they had their mother with them. That night the old pain came again, just for an instant, but long enough to stop the beating of the brave heart which would never feel its clutch again.

There are some pages in every one's life better skipped than read. What those next few hours

brought to Mary and the boys can never be told. She found herself in her own room, after awhile, lying across the foot of her bed and trying to thrust away from her the awful truth that was gradually forcing itself upon her consciousness. Dazed and bewildered, like one who has just had a heavy blow on the head, she could not adjust herself to the new conditions. She could not imagine an existence in which her mother had no part. She wondered dully how it would be possible to go on living without her. Aunt Sally Doane came in presently and took her in her arms and said the comforting things people usually say at such times, and Mary submitted dumbly, as if it were a part of a bewildering dream. At times she was sure that she must wake up presently and find that she had been in the grip of a dreadful nightmare. It was that certainty which helped her through the next few hours.

It helped her to a strange calmness when Jack came in to ask her about the trip to Plainsville. She was the one to decide that he must go alone to the quiet little God's Acre at their old home, because Norman's foot would not allow him to travel, and she could not leave him behind with just the neighbors at such a time. It was the sound

of Norman's sobbing in the next room which made her decide this, and yet at the same time she was thinking, "This is one of the most vivid dreams I ever had in my whole life, and the most horrible."

Hours after, when all the neighbors had gone but Aunt Sally and the old Captain, who stayed to keep faithful vigil, Mary stole out of her room to look at the clock. It seemed as if the night would never end. A dim light burning in the living-room showed that everything there was unchanged, while the old clock ticked along with its accustomed clatter of "All *right!* All *right!*" Surely, with the daylight everything would be all right, and would awaken to the usual round of life. Anything else was unbelievable, unthinkable!

On the way back to her room Mary's glance fell on her mother's sewing basket in its accustomed corner. A long strip of exquisitely wrought embroidery lay folded on top. It was the piece which she had finished for Betty on the day that Mrs. Downs was taken ill, that afternoon when they sat and watched the little procession file over the hill to the grove of cedars. How plainly Mary could recall the scene. How clearly she could hear her mother saying, "It is a happy way for the one who

goes, dear, to go suddenly. It is the way of all others I would choose for myself."

And then with a force that made her heart give a great jump and go on throbbing wildly, Mary realized that she was not dreaming, that her mother was really gone; that this bit of embroidery with the needle sticking just where she had left it after the final stitch, was the last that the patient fingers would ever do. Dear tired fingers, that through so many years had wrought unselfishly for her children; so unfailing in their gentleness, in their power to comfort!

With a rush of tears that blinded her so that she could no longer see the beautiful handiwork which seemed such a symbol of her mother's finished life, Mary rushed back to her room to throw herself across the bed again, and sob herself into a state of exhaustion. Then after a long time, sleep came mercifully to her relief.

When she awakened, the early light of a June dawn was stealing into the room, and the birds were singing jubilantly. She lay there a moment, wondering why she was so stiff and uncomfortable. Then she was aware that she was still dressed, and memory came back in a rush, with a pain so overwhelming that she felt utterly powerless to get

up and face the day which lay ahead of her, and all the stretch of dreary existence beyond it.

An irresistible impulse seemed drawing her towards her mother's room. Presently she opened the door a little way and stood looking in. Then step by step she advanced into the room. It looked just as it had the day before in its spotless Sabbath orderliness, except that the rosebuds in the glass vase on the table had opened into full bloom in the night. The white dress that Mrs. Ware had worn the day before lay across a chair, the sleeves still round and creased with the imprint of the arms that had slipped out of them.

As Mary stood by the bed, looking down on the still form with the smile of ineffable peace on its sweet face, her first thought was that she had never seen such gentle sleep; and then the knowledge slowly dawned on her, overwhelmingly, with a great feeling of awe that stilled her into utter calm, that that was not her mother lying there; only the familiar and beloved garment that had clothed her. She had slipped out of it as her body had slipped out of the white dress, lying there across the chair. A holy thing it was, to be sure, hallowed by the beautiful spirit which had tabernacled in it so long, and bearing her mother's imprint in every part, as

the white gown still held the imprint of the form that had worn it; but no more than that.

Somehow there was a deep strange comfort in the knowledge, even while the mystery of it baffled her. And her mother's words came back to her as forcibly as if she were hearing them for the first time:

"She is still ours. Her love flows out to us just the same. The separation cannot make her any less our own! . . . That's all that death is, Mary, just a going away into another country, as Joyce has done. . . . A beautiful mystery through which we pass as through an open gate, with glad surprise at the things that shall be made plain to us, and with a great sense of triumph!"

Now, as Mary faced this mystery, a belief began to grow up in her heart, so soothing, so comforting, that she felt it was surely heaven-sent. Somewhere in God's universe, this sunny June morning, her mother was alive and well. She was loving them all just as tenderly and deeply as she had loved them yesterday, when they all worked together, singing "Happy Day." And just as it would have grieved her then to have seen them mourning over any sorrow, so it would grieve her now to know that they were heart-broken over her going away.

Mary picked up the white dress with reverent fingers and laid her cheek against its soft folds a moment before she hung it away in the closet. Then she turned again to that other garment which had clothed her mother so long; the form which was so like her, and yet so mysteriously different, now that her warm, living personality no longer filled it.

"Dear," she whispered, her eyes brimming over, "you were too unselfish to let me see your loneliness when I wanted to go away to my Happy Valley; now that you have gone to a happier one to be with papa, I mustn't think of *my* part of it, only of yours."

There was untold comfort in that thought. She clung to it all through the hours that followed, through the simple service, and through Jack's going away, and she brought it out to comfort Norman when the two were left alone together.

"She's just away," she repeated, trying to console him with the belief which was beginning to bring a peace that passed her understanding. Every room in the house seemed to bear the imprint of the beloved presence, just as they had done during those weeks when she waited every day for her mother to come home from the Downs.

"We must think of her absence in that way," she

repeated, "as if it is only till nightfall. We can bear almost anything that long, if we take it only one day at a time. It's when we get to piling up all the days ahead of us and thinking of the years that we'll have to do without her that it seems so unbearable. And you know, Norman, if she were here she'd say by all means for you to go with Billy when he comes along with the buggy. She'd want you to spend all this afternoon in the bright out of doors instead of grieving here at home."

"But what about leaving you here alone?" asked Norman, with a new consideration for her which touched her deeply.

"Oh, I shall be busy every minute of the time until you get back. I must write to Joyce and Holland. They'll want to know every little thing. I feel so sorry for them, so far away —"

"They'll never get done being thankful now, that they came home last Christmas," said Norman in the pause that followed her unfinished sentence.

"And I'll never get done being thankful that I didn't go away," rejoined Mary. "There comes Billy now. You can hop out and show him what to do."

It had been arranged that Billy Downs should stay with them during the few days of Jack's ab-

sence, to keep them company and to do Norman's chores, which his disabled foot prevented him doing himself. Soon after dinner the two boys started off in the old rattle-trap of a buggy to drive along the shady mountain roads all afternoon in the sweet June weather, and Mary went to her letter-writing. It was a hard task, and she was thankful that she was alone, for time and again in telling of that last happy day together she pushed the paper aside to lay her head on the table and sob out, not only her own grief, but her sympathy for Holland and Joyce so far away among strangers at this heart-breaking time. She had one thing to console her which they had not, and which she treasured as her dearest memory: her mother's softly spoken commendation, "You've always been a comfort. I've *leaned* on you so."

By the time the boys came back she had regained her usual composure, for she spent the rest of the afternoon in the garden, weeding borders and doing some necessary transplanting, and finding "the soft mute comfort of green things growing," which gardens always hold. Next day in folding away some of her mother's things she came across a yellowed envelope which contained something of more permanent consolation than even her garden had

given. It was a copy of Kemble's beautiful poem, *Absence,* traced in her mother's fine clear handwriting. The ink was faded and the margin bore the date of her father's death. Several of the lines were underscored, and Mary, reading these in the light of her own experience, suddenly found the key to the great courage and serenity of soul with which her mother had faced the desolation of her early widowhood.

> *"What shall I do with all the days and hours*
> *That must be counted ere I see thy face?*
> . . . . . .
>
> *"I'll tell thee; for thy sake I will lay hold*
> *Of all good aims, and consecrate to thee*
> *In worthy deeds, each moment that is told*
> *While thou, beloved one! art far from me.*
> . . . . . .
>
> *"I will this dreary blank of absence make*
> *A noble task time. . .*
> . . . . . .
>
> *"So may my love and longing hallowed be,*
> *And thy dear thought an influence divine."*

Up till this moment there had been one element in Mary's grief which she had not recognized plainly enough to name. That was a sort of pity for the incompleteness of her mother's life; the bareness of it. The work-worn hands folded in their last rest seemed infinitely pathetic to her, and

some of her hardest crying spells had been when she thought how little they had grasped of the good things of life, and how they had been taken away before she had a chance to fill them herself as she had so long dreamed of doing. But now, in the light of these underscored lines, the worn hands no longer looked pathetic. They seemed rather to have been folded with a glad sense of triumph that they had made such "a noble task time" out of the dreary blank.

"And I shall do the same," whispered Mary resolutely, pressing her lips together in a tight line, as she slipped the paper back into its yellowed envelope and laid it aside to show it to Jack on his return.

So many household duties filled her time, that it was over a week before she resumed her daily trips to the post-office. The first time she went the old Captain's first question was:

"Of course you'll stay right on here in Lone-Rock."

"Oh, yes," was the quick answer. "As long as the boys need me." Then with a wan little smile, "I've begun to think it was never intended that I should reach my Promised Land, Captain Doane."

"Does look like it," assented the Captain gravely.

"About everything there is has stepped in to stop you. Well, your staying here is surely Lone-Rock's gain."

"I shall certainly try to make it so," was Mary's answer. "Next week I'm going to start a cooking class for the little Mexican girls. Mamma and I had been talking it over for several weeks, and she was so interested in the plan that I couldn't bear not to carry it out now, for it was her idea. We found ten that will be glad to learn. I'm to have the class in our kitchen, and Mr. Moredock has promised to donate the materials for the first half-term and Mr. Downs for the second. I'm going down to the store now to order the first lot."

"Make Pink donate something, too," suggested the Captain.

"Oh, he has, already. He's given a keg of nails and some tools to Norman and Billy, so that they can teach practical carpentry to some of the Mexican boys by showing them how to patch up their leaky shanties. Norman is a first-class carpenter for his age. It was Pink's suggestion that they should do that. I'm so grateful to him for getting Norman interested in something of the sort. It seemed as if he could never get over the dreadful shock — and — everything."

"I know," nodded the Captain, understandingly. "And there's nothing like using your hands for other people to lift the load off your own heart."

The lessons in cooking and carpentry were only a few of the things that went to the making of "a noble task time" out of the little mother's absence. They kept her always in their lives by loving mention of her name, quoting her daily, recalling this preference and that wish, and settling everything by the question "would mamma want us to do it?" And gradually time brought its slow healing, as God has mercifully provided it shall, to all wounds, no matter how deep, and the daily round of living went on.

PART II

THE TORCH

Make me to be a torch for feet that grope
Down Truth's dim trail; to bear for wistful eyes
Comfort of light; to bid great beacons blaze,
And kindle altar fires of sacrifice.
Let me set souls aflame with quenchless zeal
For high endeavors, causes true and high.
So would I live to quicken and inspire,
So would I, thus consumed, burn out and die.

Albion Fellows Bacon.

PART II

CHAPTER I

BETTY'S WEDDING

SPRING had come to Lloydsboro Valley earlier than usual. Red-bud trees glowed everywhere, and wild plum and dogwood and white lilac were all in bridal array. At The Locusts the giant trees which arched over the long avenue had not yet hung out their fragrant pennons of bloom, but old Colonel Lloyd, sauntering down towards the gate, was clad in a suit of fresh white duck. Usually he waited until the blossoming of the locusts gave the signal for donning such attire.

As he neared the gate he quickened his pace, for he had caught sight of a slim girlish figure hurrying along the path from Oaklea, and a graceful little hand waved him a greeting. It was Lloyd, coming home for the daily visit which she had never failed to make since her wedding day, six months before.

"Good mawning, grandfathah deah," she called

gaily from a distance. Then added as she joined him and lifted her face for the customary kiss, "How comes it that you are all diked up in yoah white clothes so early in the season? Don't you know that we haven't had blackberry wintah yet, and it's bound to turn cold again when they bloom? Or have you heard so much about the wedding that you just naturally put on white?"

The old Colonel playfully pinched her cheek, and linking his arm in hers, turned to go back toward the house with her.

"Well, Mrs. Rob Moore, if you must know, my actions are guided by the thermometer and not by the almanac, and I haven't heard much about this wedding, except that a young Lochinvar has come out of the West to carry away our little Betty before we are ready to give her up. It's too much to lose you both within half a year of each other."

"How utterly you have lost me!" teased Lloyd. "You see me mawning, noon and night. When I'm not at The Locusts you're at Oaklea, or at the othah end of the telephone wiah. Heah I am, come to spend the whole live-long day with you, and you say you have lost me. Own up, now. Honest! I'm yoah same little girl that I've always been. I haven't changed one bit."

"I know," he admitted, smiling down affectionately into the glowing face lifted to his. "It might have been worse. But it will be losing Betty in reality when *she* goes. Arizona is a far country. I wish that young jackanapes had never seen her. There are plenty of fine fellows back here in Kentucky she might have had, and then we'd have had her where we could see her once in a while. How long has it been since she came to The Locusts to live?"

"Twelve yeahs, grandfathah," said Lloyd, after a pause, in which she counted backward. "She's been just like a real sistah to me, and I feel worse than you do about giving her up. Lone-Rock does have a dreadfully dismal fo'saken sawt of sound. But I can ovahlook that for Jack Ware's sake. He's such a splendid fellow."

The Colonel made no answer to that, for he fully agreed with her, but changing the subject said in an aggrieved tone, "I suppose that even the few days that are left to us will be so taken up with folderols and preparations that we'll scarcely see her. It was that way when Eugenia had her wedding here; caterers and florists turning the house upside down. And it was the same way with yours. So many people in the house always going and com-

ing, so many things to be planned and discussed and decided, that I scarcely got a word in edgeways with you for a whole week before."

"It will not be that way this time," Lloyd answered. "It has been less than a yeah since Jack's mothah died, so Betty wouldn't have anything but a very quiet affair on that account. It is to be so simple and so different from any wedding that you've evah seen that you'll nevah know it's going to take place till it is all ovah. There's to be no flurry or worry about anything. Mothah wanted to make a grand occasion of it, but Betty wouldn't let her. There'll not be moah than half a dozen guests."

They had reached the house by this time, and on again being assured that Lloyd intended to remain all day, the Colonel left her and turned back to take his usual morning walk, which her coming had interrupted. The telephone bell rang just as she entered the door, so Lloyd ran up-stairs to her own room, knowing that her mother would be busy for a few minutes with giving the daily household orders. Lloyd's own ordering had been done nearly an hour, for Rob's business necessitated an early breakfast to enable him to catch the eight o'clock car into the city. He did not return until six, so

she could stay away from home any day she chose, with a clear conscience. She took her housekeeping seriously, however, and had turned out to be a most capable and thorough-going little housekeeper, but with experienced servants who had taken charge of Oaklea for years her cares were not heavy.

Her room had been kept for her, just as she had used it, all through her girlhood, and Mom Beck put fresh flowers in it every day. Lloyd always darted in for a quick look around, even when she came for only a short while. There was a glass bowl of pink hyacinths on her desk this morning, and she sat down to make a list of several things which she wanted to suggest for the coming event. Presently there was a rustle of stiffly starched skirts in the hall, and she looked up to see Mom Beck in the doorway. The old black face was beaming as she called: "How's my honey chile this mawnin'?" Then without waiting for an answer, she added, "Miss Betty said to tell you she's up in the attic rummagin', and wants you to come up right away."

Passing on down the hall, Lloyd paused beside her mother, who sat with telephone receiver to her ear, long enough to seize her in an overwhelming

embrace that muffled the conversation for an instant, then hurried up the attic stairs to find her old playmate. The little dormer windows were all thrown open, and the morning sun streamed in across the motley collection of chests, old furniture and the attic treasures of several generations.

On a camp-stool in front of a little old leather trunk, sat Betty. It was the same shabby trunk that had held all her earthly possessions when she left the Cuckoo's Nest years before, and she was packing it with some of those same keepsakes to take with her on her wedding journey to her new home in the far West. A bright bandanna was knotted into a cap to cover her curly brown hair, and a long gingham apron protected her morning dress from the attic dust.

Somehow, as she sat over the old trunk, carefully folding away the relics of her childhood, she looked so like the little Betty who had fared forth alone from the Cuckoo's Nest to the long ago house-party at The Locusts, that Lloyd exclaimed aloud over the resemblance. The three years of teaching at Warwick Hall had given her a certain grown-up sort of dignity, added a sweet seriousness to the always sweet face; but the wistful brown eyes and sensitive little mouth wore the same trustfulness of

"'DO YOU REMEMBER THE FIRST TIME YOU EVER SAW THIS?'"

expression that they had worn for the mirror in the little room up under the eaves at her Cousin Hetty's.

As Lloyd's bright head appeared at the top of the stairs, Betty glanced up, calling gaily, "You are just in time, Lloyd, to see the last of these things. Don't they take you back? Do you remember the first time you ever saw this?"

She dangled a little white sunbonnet by the string, and Lloyd, picking her way between boxes and barrels, reached out her hand for it, then dropped to a seat on the rug which had been spread out to receive the contents of the trunk.

"Indeed I do remembah it," she exclaimed. "You had it on the first time I evah saw you — travelled in it all the way to Louisville. I was so scandalized to see you arrive in a sunbonnet, that I could scarcely keep from letting you know it."

"And this," continued Betty, holding up an old-fashioned basket of brown willow with two handles and a lid with double flaps, "this was my travelling bag. My lunch was in this, and my pass, and five nickels, and the handkerchief that Davy gave me, with Red Ridinghood and the wolf printed in each corner. Here's that self-same handkerchief!" she cried, lifting the lid to peep in.

Scattered all around on the rug at her feet were many articles to be packed in the trunk, but for the next half-hour the work went slowly. Each thing that Lloyd picked up to hand to her suggested so many reminiscences to them both that they made little progress. One was a newspaper, bearing the date of Lloyd's first house-party. It was beginning to turn yellow, and Lloyd scanned the columns, wondering why Betty had saved it. Then she came to a poem marked with a blue pencil, and cried:

"Oh, Betty! Heah's yoah first published poem! The one called 'Night.' How wondahful we all thought it was that you should have something printed in a real papah, when you were only twelve. Don't you remembah, you had the measles when we carried it in to show it to you? But yoah eyes were so bad you couldn't see, and it was so pitiful. You asked to feel it. I had to guide yoah poah little groping fingah down the page and put it on the spot. It almost broke my heart!"

"I know," answered Betty. "I thought that I was going to be blind always, and that my long, long night had begun. And it seemed queer that the only thing I had ever published should be called Night. That was a terrible experience."

She laid the paper carefully back into the portfolio from which it had slipped, and picked up the next thing, a box of typewritten manuscript.

"My ill-starred novel — my story of Aberdeen Hall," she laughed. "Don't you remember the night at the Lindsey cabin when I read it aloud, and each one of you girls made such a solemn ceremony of wrapping it up? Gay furnished the box, Lucy the paper, and Kitty tied it with a fresh pink ribbon slipped out of her nightgown. And you put on the big red sealing wax seals."

"With the handle of the old silvah ladle that had the Harcourt family crest on it," interrupted Lloyd eagerly. "I can see it now, a daggah thrust through a crown, and the motto, 'I strive till I ovahcome!'"

"That was an appropriate motto," laughed Betty. "It nearly killed me when the novel came back from the publisher. I'd have burned it on the spot if it hadn't been for your grandfather. But what he said encouraged me to put that motto into practice. I'm glad now that I didn't burn the manuscript, for I've lived to see its many faults, and to be thankful that the publishers didn't accept it. I'd be heartily ashamed now to claim it as mine before a critical public. But it has much that is good in

it, and I'll do it over some day and send it out as it ought to be. In the meantime — "

She interrupted herself with a glad little cry. "Oh, I didn't tell you. I've been so joyful thinking that Jack is coming to-night, that I forgot I hadn't told you my good news. You know I've been working all winter on a book of school-girl experiences. Well, I sent it to the publishers several weeks ago, and I've just had their answer. They are so pleased with it that they want me to go on and make a series of them. The letter was lovely. I'll show it to you when we go down-stairs. It makes me feel as if fame and fortune might be just around the corner."

"Oh, Betty!" was the breathlessly joyful answer. "I'm so *glad!* I'm so *glad!* I've always told you you'd do it some day. It's a pity — " She stopped herself, then began again. "I was about to say that it's a pity you're going to be married, because you may be so taken up with yoah housekeeping and home-making that you'll nevah have time for yoah writing. But, on second thought, I can't say it. I know from experience that having Rob and a home like mine are bettah than all the books that anybody could write."

"*Jack* will never be a hindrance to authorship,"

asserted Betty positively. "He's already been the greatest help. He's so proud of everything I write, and really so helpful in his criticisms that he is a constant inspiration."

At this mention of him she reached forward and began to scrabble things hastily into the trunk.

"Here I sit, dawdling along with this packing as if the morning were not fairly flying by, and he'll be here on the five o'clock train. There's so much to do I don't know what to touch first."

Thus inspired to swift action, Lloyd began to help vigorously, and the pile of relics were soon out of sight under the travel-worn old lid. Souvenirs of their boarding-school days at Lloydsboro Seminary, of Christmas vacations, of happy friendships at Warwick Hall, went in in a hurry. Her old tennis racquet, a pennant that Rob had sent her from college, a kodak album of Keith's that they had filled together one happy summer, Malcolm's riding whip, all in at last, locked in and strapped down, ready for their journey to their new home.

Down-stairs there was other packing to do, but Mrs. Sherman was attending to that with the assistance of Mom Beck and Alec. All the stores of household linen, which was her gift to her beloved god-daughter, from whom she was parting so re-

luctantly, were carefully folded away. The chest of silver from Papa Jack, all the collection of bric-a-brac and fancy work sent in by many friends in the Valley, Lloyd's gift, a Persian rug, and the old Colonel's, a large box of carefully selected books, had already been shipped to Lone-Rock, to transform the plain old living-room into a thing of beauty. The etching which the Walton girls sent would help largely in that transforming process, also the beautiful painting of beech trees which Mrs. Walton gave, knowing that Betty loved the stately old trees as dearly as did she herself.

It was Betty's great regret that The Beeches was closed at the time and the family all away, for she longed to have these especial friends with her on her happy day. Elise was still in school at Warwick Hall, Mrs. Walton visiting Allison in her beautiful Washington home, and Kitty had gone to San Antonio for another visit with Gay Melville at the post. The wedding was to be so very quiet and simple that she could not ask any of them to come so far to be present, but she wished for them all over and over.

Eugenia would have come had it not been that it was too far to bring little Patricia for such a short visit, and she was not willing to leave her

behind. She wrote a long letter, recalling her own beautiful wedding, at which Betty had been a bridesmaid, and added, "If you're only half as happy as I am, Betty, dear, you'll never regret for an instant giving up the grand career we all prophesied for you. But in order to remind you that it is still possible for you 'to be famous though married,' Stuart and I are sending you the most efficient typewriter we can find in the shops. It has already gone on to await you in Lone-Rock."

Ever since the arrival of the first gift, a little silver vase from Miss Allison McIntyre, which would always suggest the donor's love of flowers and her garden which she shared lavishly with the whole Valley, Betty had been in a beatific state of mind over the loving favor showed her by her friends. Her pleasure reached high tide, however, when the last one arrived, a box marked from Warwick Hall. It was from Madam Chartley. The box was so big that they made all sorts of wild guesses as to its contents. Layer after layer of paper and excelsior were lifted out, and all they could find was more wrappings. At last, from the very centre, Alec lifted out a fragile cup and saucer, which Betty recognized with a cry of astonishment and delight.

"One of the ancestral teacups! I didn't suppose Madam would part with one of them for anybody!"

She turned the bit of delicate china so that Mrs. Sherman could see the crest, and the motto, "I keep tryste." The note folded inside brought happy tears to her eyes, for it said that she was the only one to whom one of these treasured heirlooms had been given. Madam felt deeply that a spiritual kinship existed between her old ancestor Edryn and the little friend who had kept tryst so faithfully in all things.

Jack came at five o'clock. He was to be the guest of Oaklea, but most of his time was spent at The Locusts. That night, when moonlight and springtime filled the valley with ethereal whiteness and sweetness, he and Betty sat out on the porch. Three generations of Romance made enchanted ground of the whole place. In the library an older Jack and Elizabeth sat recalling the night like this when they had entered *their* Arcady. Outside, under the arching locusts, up and down, up and down, paced the old Colonel in the moonlight. But not alone; for every lilac-laden breeze that stirred the branches whispered softly, "*Amanthis! Amanthis!*"

Once Jack looked at Betty, sitting beside him in the broad shaft of moonlight, its glory streaming

across her white dress and fair face and said, "It's like that song, 'Oh, fair and sweet and holy,' out here. Why couldn't we have the wedding on the porch, where I first saw you, instead of in the house? Right here in this moonlight that makes you look like a snowdrop."

"Would you really like to have it out here?" asked Betty, pleased by the idea herself and pleased because he suggested it. "It would be a very simple matter to have it so, and there'll be nobody critical enough among our few guests to call us sentimental if we do."

So it came about that the wedding next night was the simplest and most beautiful that any one there had ever witnessed. Besides the two families, Miss Allison and Alex Shelby were the only guests; Alex, because of the part he had played in restoring Jack to health, and Miss Allison, because no occasion in the Valley seemed quite complete without her. She had been too closely bound up with all the good times of Betty's little girl days and her happy maidenhood, not to be present at this time.

Betty had said, "I want my last evening at The Locusts to be just like the first one that I ever spent here, in one way. Then Lloyd sang and played on her harp. I've missed it so much since she took

it over to Oaklea. I'd love to have the memory of her music one of the last that I carry away with me."

So that night, when she stepped out on the porch all dressed for her bridal, she found the harp standing in one corner, gleaming in the moonlight like burnished gold. Fair and tall, it impressed her as it had done when it first struck her childish fancy, that its strings had just been swept by some one of the Shining Ones beyond, who were a part of the Pilgrim's dream. She was standing beside it when Lloyd and Rob and Jack walked over from Oaklea. Her filmy white dress, exquisitely cloud-like and dainty, was as simple and girlish as the one she had worn the night before; but this time Jack did not compare her to a snowdrop. The moonlight gave such an unearthly whiteness to her gown, such a radiance to her upturned face, that he, too, thought of the Pilgrim's dream, and likened her to one of the Shining Ones herself.

With that thought came the memory of a beloved voice as he had heard it for the last time at the end of a perfect Sabbath, singing of those "Angels of Light," that had been so very real to him since they first trailed comfort through his earliest lullabies. Man as he was, something like a poignant

ache seemed to grip his throat till he could not speak for a moment, because "the little mother" was having no part in this, the crowning happiness of his life.

Later, Miss Allison and Alex dropped in as informally as if they had come to make an ordinary evening call, and they all sat talking awhile. Then Lloyd took her place at the harp and sang the songs that Betty loved best, till the moon rose high enough to send a flood of silvery light between the tall white pillars. There was a little stir around the hall door, and Lloyd, seeing the colored servants, who had gathered there to listen, step back respectfully, gave a signalling nod. The old minister, who had just arrived by the side door, came out past them.

Lloyd's fingers went on touching the harp-strings, so softly that it seemed as if a wandering breeze had tangled in them. Every one rose as the minister came out, and Jack, taking Betty by the hand, led her directly to him. There was no need of book to prompt the silver-haired old pastor. He had joined too many lives in the course of his long ministry, not to know every word of the solemn ritual.

There in the fragrant stillness of the moon-flooded place, with the odor of the lilacs and the

snowy wild-plum blossoms entrancingly sweet, and the melody dropping softly from the harp-strings like a fall of far-off crystal bells, they gave themselves to each other:

"I, John Alwyn, take thee, Elizabeth Lloyd."

"I, Elizabeth Lloyd, take thee, John Alwyn."

"Until death us do part."

It was all so sacred and beautiful and still, that even Rob felt the tears start to his eyes, and no one moved for a full moment after the benediction. Even then there was not the usual buzz of congratulations that always follows such a ceremony; but the tender embraces and heartfelt hand-clasps showed that the spell of the solemn scene was still upon them.

Suddenly lights streamed out through all the windows, the dining-room doors were thrown wide open, and Alec bowed the party in to the bridal repast. It, too, was as simple as all that had gone before, save for the towering cake in the centre.

"We just had to have that a mammoth and a gorgeous affair," explained Lloyd, "to send around to all Betty's admiring friends and old pupils who could not be asked to the ceremony. We'll be busy for a week sending off the little boxes."

"No," she replied later, to Alex Shelby, "Betty

wouldn't have any of the usual charms and frills, like 'something borrowed, something blue.' She says she's lost faith in them since so many of them that she's known of at different weddings have failed to come true. Besides, everybody heah has their fate already settled. We all know about yoah engagement to Gay, even if it hasn't been announced. You'll be the next to go. You don't need a ring in a cake, or the bride's bouquet thrown over the bannistah to tell you *that*."

Later, when it was time to start to the station, and Betty had joined them again in her travelling dress, the old Colonel looked out to see what was delaying the carriage.

"It's not coming at all, grandfathah deah," explained Lloyd. "The baggage has gone on ahead and Betty wants to walk. She said she'd rathah go that way, just as if she were only saying good night to you and mothah and Papa Jack, and would be back in a little while. She doesn't want it to seem like a long good-bye. She wants her last look at you all to be heah at home."

But, in spite of everybody's efforts to make it appear that this was just a casual going away, only a temporary separation, Betty found the parting almost more than she could bear. She clung to her

god-mother a moment at the last, wanting to sob out all her love and gratitude for the beautiful years she was leaving behind her, but there were no words deep enough. Her last kiss was given in silence more eloquent than speech. At the bottom of the steps she whisked away the tears which would gather despite her brave resolve to fight them back, and turned for one more look at the House Beautiful before she left it to go farther on her pilgrim way.

There they stood, the three who had filled her life so full, who had taken the place of father and mother and indulgent grandfather in her life. She smiled bravely as she gave them a parting wave of her hand. She could not let tears dim her last sight of those dear faces. Another wave for Mom Beck and Alec, Walker and old Aunt Cindy, who stood behind them calling their blessings and good wishes after her. Then she went on with the others.

The moonlight filtered down through the trees, casting swaying shadows on the long white avenue. Rob, walking ahead with Lloyd, looked back when they came to the "measuring tree," to say to Miss Allison and Alex, who were just behind:

"It doesn't seem natural for a crowd of this

size to start out on a night like this in such a quiet way. We always used to sing. Strike up, Alex!"

Instantly there was wafted back to the watchers on the porch the words of a familiar old song:

> "It was from Aunt Dinah's quilting party
> I was seeing Nellie home."

How many scores of times had that song echoed through the valley! They had sung it crunching through the snow with their skates on their shoulders; they had hummed it strolling through starry August nights when the still air was heavy with the smell of dew-laden lilies. Now, once more they sang it, like boys and girls together again, and Betty wiped her eyes with a little thrill of pleasure when Jack's voice joined in the chorus. She had never heard him sing before and she did not know that he had such a deep, sweet voice. It pleased her, too, to know that he was familiar with the song and could join in with the others as readily as if he had always had a part in her happy past.

At the gate she turned for one more look at the house, with its lights streaming from every window, and wondered when she would ever see it again.

"But no matter how long it may be," she thought, "I can carry the cheer of those lights with me al-

ways, wherever I go. It's been such a happy, happy home."

When they reached the station there were only a few moments to wait for the train. She stood holding Lloyd's hand in silence while the others talked, until they heard it rumbling down the track. It was a fast express that stopped only by special order, and then only long enough to throw the trunks on, so the leave-taking was over in a rush. In another instant she was sitting with her face pressed against the window pane, peering out for a last glimpse of the place. She saw just one quickly vanishing light as they sped by, and whispered, "Good-bye, dear Valley."

A sudden feeling of homesickness took possession of her for one long moment. Then Jack's hand closed over hers, holding it in a warm, strong clasp, and she knew that he understood just what that parting meant to her. Instantly there sprang up in her heart the knowledge that all she had left behind was as nothing to the love and sympathy that was to enfold her henceforth.

CHAPTER II

TOWARDS THE CANAAN OF HER DESIRE

In Phil Tremont's office desk, in an inner drawer reserved for private papers, lay a package of letters fastened together by a broad rubber band. "From the Little Vicar," it was labelled, and Mary's astonishment would have been great, could she have known that every letter she had ever written him was thus preserved. He had kept the first ones, written in a childish, painstaking hand, because they chronicled the doings of the family at Ware's Wigwam in such an amusing and characteristic way. The letters after that time had been few and far between until her final return to Lone-Rock, but each one had been kept for some different reason. It had contained a particularly laughable description of some of her Warwick Hall escapades, or some original view of life and the world in general which made it worth preserving.

Then when Mrs. Ware's letters ceased, and at Phil's urgent request Mary took up her mother's

custom of writing regularly to him, he kept them because they revealed so much of herself. So brave, so womanly, so strong she had grown, bearing her great sorrow as the Jester did his hidden sword, to prove that "undaunted courage was the jewel of her soul." All during the lonely summer after her mother's death he expected to go to see her in the fall, but the work which held him in Mexico was not finished, and too much depended upon its successful completion for him to ask for leave of absence.

Then, just as he was about to start back to the States, his chief was taken ill, and asked him to stay and fill his place in another engineering enterprise which he had made a contract for. It was an opportunity too big for Phil to thrust aside, even if his sense of obligation had not been so great to the man who had helped make him what he was. So he consented to stay on another year. The place to which he was sent, where the great new dam was to be constructed, was further in the interior. His papers, brought over on mule back, were a week old when they reached him, and Mary's letters attained an importance they might not have had otherwise, had he been in a less lonely region.

It was with great satisfaction that he heard of

Jack's marriage. He felt that Mary would be more satisfied to stay on in Lone-Rock indefinitely now that she had Betty's companionship. Her letters were enthusiastic about the new sister, whom she had long loved, first with the admiration of a little girl for an older one, then with that of a pupil for an adored teacher. Now they seemed of the same age, and of the same mind about essential things, especially the pedestal on which they both placed Jack.

Betty fitted into the family as beautifully as if she had always been a part of it, Mary wrote soon after her arrival. She loved Lone-Rock the moment she laid eyes on it, and made friends with everybody right away. She thought it an ideal place in which to write, and already was at work on the series which the publishers had asked for. Norman was "simply crazy" about her, and Jack was so happy and proud that it did one's heart good to see him.

As for Mary herself, it was easy for Phil to see the vast difference that Betty's coming had made in her life. He laid these letters aside with the others as they came, thankful for the happy spirit that breathed through them, for now he was convinced that she "really felt the gladness she had only feigned before." She was all aglow once more with

her old hopes and ambitions. Despite her efforts to hide it he had discerned how dreary the days had been for her hitherto, and now he was glad he could think of her with the background she pictured for him. Betty's coming had brightened it wonderfully. But just as he was beginning to be sure she was satisfied and settled, a little note came to disturb his comfort in that belief. It was evidently scrawled in haste and began abruptly without address or date.

"'*And it came to pass . . . when the cloud was taken up . . . they journeyed!*' Oh, Phil, the signal to move on has come at last! I have no idea what it will lead to. It may be to the wells of some Elim, it may be to that part of the wilderness 'where there is no water to drink.' But wherever it may be I'm convinced that Providence is pointing the way, for the call came without my lifting so much as a little finger. It came through Madam Chartley. I'm to be secretary for a friend of hers, a Mrs. Dudley Blythe of Riverville, at a big salary — at least it seems big to me — and I'm leaving in the morning. That's all I know now, but I'll write you full particulars as soon as I'm settled.

"Manuella, the clever little Mexican maid who

has tided us over various emergencies, is coming to help Betty with the work, so that the writing may not be interfered with. Yours, once more on the march towards the Canaan of her desire,

" M. W."

The next was a note scribbled at some junction near the end of her journey.

" Five hours late, so we've missed connection and are side-tracked here, waiting for the fast express to pass us. Nothing at all has happened as there usually does on my travels, and I've met no interesting people. But I've had a really thrilling time just guessing what my future is to be like. I've imagined Mrs. Dudley Blythe to be every kind of a woman that would be likely to employ a secretary, from a stern-eyed suffragette to a modern Mrs. Jellyby interested in the heathen. All I've had to build on was Madam Chartley's night letter and Mrs. Blythe's telegram in answer to mine, and naturally that was slim material.

" What I'm hoping is, that Mrs. Blythe is a grand society dame, who needs a secretary to attend to her invitations and list of engagements. I'd like for her to be that, or else a successful writer who

wanted me to type her manuscript. It would be so lovely to be behind the scenes at the making of a book, and maybe to meet a lot of literary lions at close range. I've blocked out enough scenes from those two situations to fill a two-volume Duchess novel. But, in order to keep from being too greatly disappointed, I tell myself that it's not at all probable that Mrs. Blythe will be either of those things. Most likely she's in a big mail-order business of some kind that requires a large correspondence, and I'll be tamely quoting prices on hats, hair-goods or imported trimmings for the next dozen years. I am 'minded that:

> " ' There are two moments in a diver's life.
> One when, a beggar, he prepares to plunge,
> One when, a prince, he rises with his pearl.
> *Festus, I plunge!* '

" More anon. MARY."

" June 15, RIVERVILLE.

" Here I am, bobbing up serenely with *something,* but still unable to say whether it be pearl or pebble. Mrs. Blythe is not the grand personage I pictured her to be, for there was no liveried footman to meet me at the station, no carriage in waiting. Nor is she an author. Mrs. Crum, the landlady of this caravansary, told me that. I rattled

up in a 'bus to the number of the house given in Mrs. Blythe's telegram, and found it to be a comfortable looking boarding-house on a quiet side street, shaded by scraggly old sycamores. Mrs. Blythe had engaged a room for me here, and left a note telling me where and how to find her in the morning.

"It was so near supper-time that Mrs. Crum had to go right down-stairs before I could ask any more questions, and I followed in a very few moments. I am disappointed in one thing. I had hoped to be in an interesting private family. I had hoped that Mrs. Blythe would want me to stay in her house, but I think I shall like it here.

"My room is big and airy and simply furnished, the supper was good, and as far as I can see I'm lots better off than Jo was in 'Little Women,' when she left home to be a governess. For one thing, there is no old bearded professor in the background to work on one's sympathies and get interested in, in lieu of some one better. Of course Professor Baher was dear in lots of ways, but I never could forgive Jo for marrying that bewhiskered old Tueton.

"So far as I have discovered, the boarders are all widows and orphans, though the oldest orphan is

old enough to vote, and is a reporter on the Riverville *Herald*. He sat next to me at the table, at supper, and I found out from him that my first guess was partly correct, even if there was no liveried footman to meet me at the station. Mrs. Blythe *is* one of the social leaders of Riverville and has a lovely home. But this city isn't large enough to justify any one's keeping a social secretary. He said so. It's just a big, commonplace, hustling manufacturing town like a hundred others in the middle West. I didn't like to ask any personal questions about Mrs. Blythe of *Orphant Annie*. (That's the name I couldn't help giving the young reporter in my own mind. He was introduced as Mr. Sandford Berry.) He looks the character to perfection; sort of old for his years, spry and capable, as if he'd spent his youth in doing the chores and shooing the hens away. Besides, he gave me a lot of wise advice, as if he were a full-fledged man of the world and I a little hayseed from the West who didn't know enough to get out of the way of a go-cart. He has pale blue pop eyes, and an alert little blond mustache, and his whole air seems to say, 'The gobelins'll git you, if you don't watch out.'

"He took it for granted that I knew all about my future employer, and, of course, I didn't tell

him any better. I just tried in a roundabout way to lead him on to talk of her. He is very enthusiastic about her work, though I gathered only a vague idea of what it is, despite my clever manœuvring to find out. He called her a grand little woman. As he has interviewed her several times he knows her personally. What he said was certainly encouraging, but he finished his supper so soon after he began to talk about her that I came up-stairs still knowing very little more than when I went down.

" A street light glimmered in the front windows, so that I did not turn on the gas at first, but sat looking down at the people strolling along the pavement below. The house stands very close to the street, so that I could hear everything any one said in passing, and it seemed to bring me right into the thick of things, as I so often wished to be, back there in the desert. The warm, wet smell of the freshly sprinkled streets, the whiff of an occasional cigar, the sound of a street piano in the next block, all seemed so strange yet so friendly and sociable. It made me feel for a little while — oh, I can hardly explain it — as if the old Mary Ware that I used to be was a million miles away, and as if the Mary Ware sitting here in Riverville was an entirely dif-

ferent person. I couldn't make it seem possible that the 'me' who was sitting there in the hot June dusk, looking down on the lively streets, was the same person who only a few days before had no other excitement in life than making Jack's coffee or ironing Norman's shirts back in the hills of Arizona.

"I wasn't homesick or lonesome in the least, but I had such a queer, untied, set-adrift sensation, like the man must have had who wrote that hymn, 'Lo, on a narrow neck of land, 'Twixt two unbounded seas I stand.' The yesterdays are one sea, and the to-morrows another, and me, waiting between them, just a scrap of humanity — a stranger in a strange city — wondering and wondering and wondering what the next day would bring.

"Then I began to be almost afraid of what I'd undertaken, and all of a sudden grew so cold and depressed that I wished I was back in my own little room in Lone-Rock. The shutters of the back window had been closed all this time, and when I got up to light the gas and write to Jack of my safe arrival, I opened them to see what kind of an outlook I was to have from that window. You can imagine my surprise when I found that it gave me a glimpse of the river. Such a wide, full, sweeping

river, with just enough of a young moon over it to define its banks, and remind me of the beautiful silvery Potomac that I used to watch from my window at Warwick Hall.

"A big steamboat came gliding around the bend, with a deep musical whistle that sent the same kind of an echo booming along the water, and there were lights twinkling from every deck and from the wharves along shore to which it was headed. Somehow it made me think of a song that we used to sing at the Wigwam, and that Holland always sang wrong, for some unaccountable reason insisting on saying 'shining' instead of 'margin.'

"'At the *shining* of the river, lay we every burden down.'

"The wide silvery tracks that the crescent moon and the wharf lights made reassured me, and I stopped worrying about the future, and laid my burden of apprehension and depression right down, and just sat and enjoyed the sight. Presently I saw a little launch put out from the wharf and go chugging merrily over towards the far side, and suddenly I realized that that other shore was Kentucky. I was in sight of my Promised Land, although my particular portion of it was several hundred miles away. I had been so occupied with other

things that I had forgotten what part of the map I was on.

"I stood right up, so excited that I could hardly keep from squealing and whirling around on my toes, as I used to do. My first impulse was to run and tell somebody of my discovery. Then I remembered with a sort of shock that there wasn't anybody I could tell. Not a soul in the whole city who *cared*. For a moment that thought made me utterly and wretchedly homesick. But it all passed away the moment I began my letter to Jack and Betty. I think the reason that this epistle to you has grown longer and more garrulous than usual, is because you have assured me so often of your interest in all my comings and goings, and it seems so good to pour out everything to somebody who cares to hear. So, I am sure, you will rejoice with me in the discovery that my back window looks away to the dim shores of my Promised Land, and that that view will help me 'to hold out faithful to the end,' as old Brother Petree used to say in prayer meeting."

"June 22.

"I didn't intend to write so soon again, but your letter has just come with all those kodak pictures

of your bachelor quarters, and the big dam, and the different views of your mountain background. I am so glad to have them, especially the ones that have *you* in them, and most especially that one of you in the camp chair with the hat on the back of your head. You look exactly as if you were about to speak, and I have stood that one on my table, and am looking at it now as I write. I am glad you sent it, for really I am becoming so engrossed with my new work, that I need some reminder of my past life to keep me from forgetting what manner of person I used to be. I have had such an absorbing week.

"To begin with, I found that Mrs. Blythe, who is comparatively a young woman, although she has two sons away at school, is one of the old Warwick Hall girls. She wears the alumni pin, with Edryn's crest on it and the motto 'I keep tryste.' And she adores Madam Chartley and everything connected with the school. After I discovered that I knew everything would be all right no matter what she set me to doing.

"She had a dressmaker there fitting a gown for her, when I was ushered into her room, and there wasn't a thing in it to suggest her need of a secretary except a frivolous looking little desk in one

corner. She talked to me about Warwick Hall all the time she was being fitted until a neighbor dropped in to ask her to pour tea for her at an informal reception next day. I 'sized her up,' as the boys say, as a pretty little woman fond of dainty clothes and good times, one who would always shine at a social function and be popular because she is such a winsome, sweet little thing, but not much more than that.

"When the dressmaker left, Mrs. Blythe crossed over to the desk and opened it, and it was so chuck full of papers and letters and business-like looking legal documents, that they began to pour out all over the floor.

"She said in a laughing way that that was the reason she needed another pair of hands, and then turned and gave me a searching look with those dark eyes of her, as if she were taking *my* measure, and said:

"'I hope that Madam Chartley was not mistaken and that you will prove equal to the task, for it is a big undertaking I've called you to help me with — *The awakening of a State!*'

"I was as astonished as if a fluffy little kitten had opened its mouth, and instead of gently mewing, had roared out, 'Cry havoc and let slip the dogs

of war!' Luckily she was so busy sorting the papers and stuffing them back into pigeon-holes that she didn't see my face, or she couldn't have gone on in such a matter of course way to explain what she wanted me to do. She said I must become so thoroughly familiar with the situation that I could answer most of the letters that come to her, without her dictation, and in order to do that she'd have to take me over the ground that she had been over, and let me see for myself just what had aroused her to undertake the work she was engaged in. That just as soon as she could give the cook her daily orders we'd start right out.

"While she put on her hat and little face veil, she explained that she had become interested in the first place while taking flowers to a crippled child in the tenement district. Seeing how absorbed she seemed in getting her hat and veil on 'just so,' I couldn't help thinking that she must have taken up her charities as so many society women do, who are impulsive and kind-hearted, just as a fad to help occupy their leisure hours. But it wasn't long before I found how mistaken I was in my judgment of her.

"We took a street-car, and on the way she explained that she was going to show me what might

be seen in almost any town of its size in the United States, and in many of its villages. We stopped on a shady street corner and passed a row of houses on a respectable looking street. She told me that she had grown up in Riverville and had walked up and down that street nearly every day of her life, and that she never knew till last year that those respectable fronts of houses opened on to interiors and into back yards that were a disgrace to any civilization. The other property owners on that block were perfectly horrified when she published a description of it, with photographs of the worst spots. It stirred up a great deal of talk and indignation, but nobody did anything to make it better, and soon the interest died out and people forgot.

"I wish you could have seen her face when she told me that and when she said, '*But I made up my mind that I would change conditions if I had to fight a lifetime and fight single-handed, and I'll fight to the death!*'

"When I saw the determination in her face, not only did I wonder how I could have been so mistaken in my first estimate of her, but I felt a queer responsive thrill at her enthusiasm, that made me sure she can succeed in anything she attempts.

"Well, I've read of slums and have always taken

it as a matter of course that it was one of the evils to be expected in a large city, but I never thought to see with my own eyes what I saw that day, in an ordinary town like Riverville. Maybe living so long as I have done on the clean, fresh desert and in the pure air of the hills, made it seem worse to me, but anybody would have been horrified at what she showed me. When I exclaimed over the filth and foul odors, as we picked our way over the ash-piles and garbage and slimy pools in one back yard, and said that people might at least keep themselves clean, even if they were poor, she turned on me, her eyes fairly blazing.

"'That's what everybody says!' she exclaimed. 'That's why I brought you here, to prove to you that these tenants are not to blame. Look! This house was originally built for two families, but *ten* families are crowded into it now, with only one cistern to provide water for the whole lot. And every drop of it has to be carried to the different stories in buckets. No wonder they have to be "sparin' of water," as little Elsie Whayne complained, when I found her crying over her line full of yellow-gray, half-clean clothes. She had come from the country, where she had had an unlimited supply, and couldn't get used to hoarding every

drop. The landlord won't provide city water, and there is no law to make him do it.'

"As she spoke the nasty, greasy contents of a dishpan came splashing over the railing of the porch above us, into the court where we were standing, and we barely escaped being drenched with it. A few drops did reach me, and when I expressed my disgust most forcibly, Mrs. Blythe said apologetically, 'Don't blame the poor woman. She has no other place to throw it. The landlord won't provide drains and there is no law to make him do it. And up-stairs, I am going to show you three rooms *without windows,* where people live and eat and sleep by lamplight, without a ray of sunshine or a breath of fresh air. All that they get of either air or light must filter through other stale, overcrowded rooms. And if you wonder, as I did, why the landlords do not cut windows in these dark rooms, and mend the leaky roofs and the dangerous stairways, you'll find the answer is the same. There is no law to make them do it. The houses bring good rents as they stand, and the public is not awake to the fact that these places in their midst are responsible for the greater part of infection and disease that menace the whole town. That is the cause I am giving myself to, and the cause that I want

to make yours also. We must wake up the State. We must make them pass a law that will wipe out these plague spots already existing and prevent the growth of any more. A law that will allow no renter to make money off a house that is not decent to shelter human beings.'

"That is a sample of the places she showed me, places where the plaster was off the walls in great patches, and the paper hung in greasy tatters, and where we encountered so many nauseating sights and smells that by the time we were back at her house I didn't have any appetite for lunch. She told me that it affected her that way too, at first, and it got so that a procession of white-faced, wailing babies began to appear to her in the dead of night and cry for her to help them; to give them a chance to breathe in the stifling midnight, a chance to claim their birthright of clean water and air and sun. And she added, 'When you get to seeing things at night you're ready for work.'

"Already she has written hundreds of letters on the subject, to individuals and to clubs who have influence, and I am to help her with hundreds more. We are to send one to each member of the Legislature. I think it is great fun to be mixed up with 'affairs of State,' and I shall feel so grand having

a hand in writing to senators and representatives. I'm going with her to some of the near-by towns to take photographs of the worst places. We're to have a collection representing every town and city in the State, and mount them on large posters for the public to see. That part of the work will be intensely interesting. I don't mind pounding away at the typewriter from daylight till dark, but I must confess to you what I'll not tell any one at home. The other part of the work, the contact with the suffering and misery and dirt that we see daily simply makes me sick.

"I asked *Orphant Annie* how he supposed a dainty little woman like Mrs. Blythe stands it, and he said she had answered that question herself in a poem that she had written by request for the Riverville *Herald*. I was so surprised to know that she is a poet too, that he said he'd look up the verses for me. He did, and brought me a copy of them when he came that night at dinner. He doesn't seem as pop-eyed now that I know him better, and he says some very bright things occasionally. This is the poem. I am sending it so that you'll see how mistaken I was at first in assuming that Mrs. Blythe was just a kind-hearted little social butterfly, who had taken up housing betterment as a fad. Some

of the divine fire that inspired the great reformers of all the ages must burn in her soul, or she couldn't have written this poem that she calls *The Torch.*

"'Make me to be a torch for feet that grope
Down Truth's dim trail; to bear for wistful eyes
Comfort of light; to bid great beacons blaze,
And kindle altar fires of sacrifice!

"'Let me set souls aflame with quenchless zeal
For great endeavors, causes true and high.
So would I live to quicken and inspire,
So would I, thus consumed, burn out and die.'

"Mr. Berry says that is just what Mrs. Blythe is, a torch to set others aflame. He has heard her talk to clubs and societies about her work, and he says that she is so convincing that before the summer is over she'll have me blazing like a house afire, the biggest beacon in the bunch. But I don't think much of *Orphant Annie* as a prophet. It is just one of his ways of always saying the gobelins'll git you. I know they'll never get me to the extent of making me 'speak in meetin'.' Now you know just what it is I have gone into, and can picture the daily life quite accurately of Yours as ever, Mary Ware, late of Lone-Rock, now Reformer of Riverville."

CHAPTER III

THE SUPREME CALL

THAT was the last letter which Phil received from Mary for many weeks, although he wrote regularly to the address she gave of the boarding-house on the sycamore-shaded street. Several times she sent a postal with a scribbled line of acknowledgment, but the days were too full for personal affairs, and at night she was too tired to attend to her own correspondence, after pounding on the typewriter so many hours.

She had attacked her new duties with all the zeal and force that had characterized her "snake-killings" on the desert. Habit alone made her do that, and pride added another motive. She was determined to justify Madam Chartley's opinion of her. Not being able to write shorthand she worked overtime to gain extra speed on the typewriter, so that she might take dictation directly on the machine. Now, all the neatness and system which had made her housekeeping so perfect in its way,

made her a painstaking and methodical little business woman. Her neatly typed pages were a joy to Mrs. Blythe. Her system of filing and indexing brought order out of confusion in the topsy-turvy desk, and she soon had the various reports which they referred to daily, labelled and arranged in the different pigeon-holes as conveniently as the spice boxes and cereal jars had been in the kitchen cabinet at home.

It was not long before Mrs. Blythe began handing letters over to her as Jack had done, saying briefly, tell them this or thus, and leaving her to frame the answer in the best style she could. This spurred her on to still greater effort, and she made up her mind to become so familiar with every branch of the subject that she could give an intelligent answer to any question that might be asked. Once she wrote home to Jack:

"I am beginning to see now some of the things that my Desert of Waiting in Lone-Rock taught me. I couldn't fill this position half so satisfactorily if I hadn't had the training that you gave me in your office in all sorts of business forms and details. I am especially thankful for the letters you made me answer in my own words. Mrs. Blythe turns over two-thirds of her mail to me now to be

answered in that way. She has had many invitations lately from clubs in neighboring towns, asking her to go and explain what it is she wants them to do, and she feels that she can't afford to miss a single opportunity of the kind. Every time she gives a talk she gets more people interested in the cause, and they in turn interest other people, and that sends the ball rolling still farther. Really, it is getting to be as exciting as a game of ' Prisoners' Base,' seeing how many we can get on ' our side,' and when she is out of town and I am left to ' guard base,' I surely feel as if I am ' It,' and had the whole responsibility on my shoulders."

It must be confessed that it was Mary's pride in doing her work well which made her a competent helper, more than any personal interest which she took in Mrs. Blythe's plans. After the first round of visits to the tenements she kept away from them as much as possible. The first month's salary was accorded a silent jubilee in her room. Most of it had to go for board and some few things she needed, but she started a savings account and locked away her bank-book with the feeling that she was laying the corner-stone of her home in the Happy Valley. True, there wasn't the same joy in planning for it that there had been when she looked

forward to her mother sharing it with her, but it was with a sense of deep satisfaction that she opened her account and carried home the little book with its first entry.

On one of the occasions when Mrs. Blythe was away from home for several days, an indignant letter came from some one in a town where she had spoken the previous week, demanding to know why she was making such a fight to have a law passed which would work hardship to worthy landlords who were good citizens and prominent in all public charities. It named a man in Riverville as a sample of the kind of citizen she was trying to injure, and demanded so threateningly her reasons for doing so, that Mary was troubled by its covert threats. Mrs. Blythe would not be back till the end of the week, Mr. Blythe was in New York, and there was no one in Riverville whom she knew well enough to discuss the situation with. After worrying over it all one day and night, quite unexpectedly she found out what she wanted to know from Sandford Berry.

He came out on the side porch where she was sitting after an early lunch, and paused to light a cigar. Something prompted her to refer casually to the man who had been spoken of in the letter as

a model citizen, and to ask if the reporter knew him.

"Oh, yes, he's a charitable old cuss," was Mr. Berry's elegant answer. "His name leads all the subscription lists a-going; but I'll give you a tip on the side, if you're after him to get a bit of local color for any of your documents. Just make some excuse to visit some lodging houses he owns on the corner of Myrtle and Tenth Streets. Diamond Row they call it, because they say he gets the worth of his wife's gorgeous diamonds out of it in rents every year, and she has the most notable ones in town. It's the worst ever! I don't think Mrs. Blythe has discovered it yet. I didn't get into it myself until the other day, when I had to go to report an accident, but we newspaper men unearth all the sights that are to be seen, eventually."

"Would it be all right for me to go — I mean safe?" asked Mary hesitatingly.

"Sure!" was the cheerful answer. "It's safe as far as the people you'll meet are concerned. I can't say as much for the germs."

"But I haven't a shadow of excuse for going," faltered Mary. "I couldn't walk into a hovel out of sheer curiosity without some reason for intruding, any more than I could into a rich person's

home. I haven't any more right to do the one than the other."

"That's what they all say," answered Sandford Berry. "But there is a difference. You'll find that those tenants are glad of a chance to tell their troubles to some one. Oh, of course, they'd spot you if you went poking in for no reason *but* curiosity, but anybody with tact and a desire to get at the real inwardness of things for the purpose of bettering them would find a welcome. *Those* people know the difference."

He puffed away in silence a moment, considering a way to help her as he had often helped Mrs. Blythe, and taking it for granted that Mary was just as eager for his suggestions as the other one had been.

"You might tell them you are looking for an old woman from the country who knits some sort of lace for sale. There used to be one there. At least, I've seen an old woman who used to be always knitting, sitting at a corner window. I don't know whether she sold it or not, or whether she was from the country. But it will do for an opening wedge, and with her to start on you can easily get into conversation with any of them." Then, as Mary still hesitated, he added, "If you really want to

investigate and feel anyways backward about it, I'll walk down that far with you and show you where it is. It happens to be on my beat."

Mary really had no wish to go. She shrank from contact with something which the experienced Mr. Berry pronounced "the worst ever." But he was waiting so confidently for her to put on her hat and accompany him, that there seemed nothing else for her to do.

"Get an eye on those basement rooms," he advised her as he left her at the corner of Myrtle and Tenth Streets, and pointed out the steps leading to the underground rooms in Diamond Row. With the helpless feeling of one who cannot swim, yet is left to plunge alone into icy water, Mary stood at the top of the steps until she was afraid her hesitation would attract attention. Then plucking up her courage, she forced herself to walk down and knock at the open door.

What she saw in her first quick glance was a girl no older than herself, lying on a dirty bare mattress, a woman bending over a wash-tub, and a baby crawling around the floor. What she saw in her second horrified glance was that a green mould stood out on the walls, that both plaster and lath were broken away in places, so that one could

peer through into an adjoining cellar. Evidently the cellar had water standing in it, from the foul, dank odor which came in through the holes. And the water must have seeped through into this room at times, for some of the planks in the floor nearest the wall were rotting.

The woman looked up listlessly without taking her arms from the tub, as Mary made her faltering inquiry for the old lady who made lace, and answered in some foreign tongue. Then she bent again to her rubbing, in stolid indifference to the stranger who had made a sudden descent on her home. Mary was too inexperienced to know that one cause of her indifference was that she was too underfed and overworked and mentally stunted by her hideous surroundings to care who came and went around her.

Mary turned to the girl on the musty mattress. It wasn't actual starvation which drew the skin so tightly over her cheek-bones and gave the pinched look to her face, for there was food still left on the cluttered table, where flies buzzed over the unwashed dishes in sickening swarms. It was the disease which had claimed a victim, sometimes several, from every family in turn who occupied the room, because it had never been properly dis-

infected. Not even the sunlight could get in to do its share towards making it fit for a human dwelling, for the only windows of this half-underground room were narrow transoms near the ceiling, and the only air reached it through the door at the bottom of the steps.

The girl was evidently asleep, and, after one more glance, Mary turned with a shudder and hurried back up the steps. She hesitated to make a second attempt but nerved herself to it by the thought of the questions Sandford Berry was sure to ask of her. On the first floor she knocked at several doors, and although she found no clue to the old lace knitter, she soon found a welcome from a voluble old Irish woman, who hospitably invited her in. Her eyes were that bad, she explained, that she couldn't see to do much. Her family worked in the factory all day, and she was glad of some one to talk to.

The door into the hall stood open, and presently another woman strayed in, scenting entertainment of some kind, and then a much younger woman followed, a slatternly creature with a sickly looking baby in her arms. Old Mrs. Donegan talked freely of her neighbors after Mary had tactfully won her confidence. She told her that most of them worked

in the factory. The Polish woman in the basement washed for some of the factory hands, and although she worked all day and often far into the night, it took nearly all she could make to pay the rent. There wasn't enough to buy medicine for the girl, who was dying of consumption.

"Why don't they leave here and go out to the country?" asked Mary. "People out there need help, and they could at least have clean water, and clean grass to lie on. They'd be better off out under the trees than in that basement."

"Mrs. Donegan's dim eyes narrowed shrewdly. "Did you ever see a rat caught in a trap?" she asked. "*It* can't help itself. *It* can't get out. No more can they. They can't even speak English."

"Don't you go to telling the landlord we complained," whined the woman with the baby. "He'd turn us out. Rents are so high everywhere that I tramped for days to find this place. The others was worse than this."

Mary's evident friendliness and warmly expressed interest soon started all three of the women to telling tales of Diamond Row. Mrs. Donegan's were the worst, as she claimed the distinction of being the oldest inhabitant. The one that aroused Mary's greatest indignation was of a child which

had been drowned in the cellar ten years ago. The inside staircase going to the basement ran down over the cellar in some way, and it was so rotten in parts that it gave way one day and he fell through. It was in the spring, when the river was so high that the cellar was half full of backwater, and the child drowned before they could get him out.

Mrs. Donegan gave a dramatic account of it, omitting none of the gruesome details, for she had been fond of the pretty golden-haired boy of three, and sympathized with all the ardor of her warm Irish heart with the old grandmother, who was one of her best friends.

"That's sorrow for you," she exclaimed, shaking her head dismally. "If you could only see the poor old creature now, so crippled up with the misery in her bones that she can't leave her chair, and nothing for her to do all day but sit and eat her heart out with longing for little Terence. Ah, he was the fine lad, always hanging on his granny's chair and putting his little curly head on her shoulder to be petted. She keeps one of those curls always by her in a little box on the table, and like the sunshine it is. Come in and see it now. Do," she urged hospitably. "It's always glad she is to talk about him and cry over the sad end he come to."

Mary drew back, protesting that she couldn't bear to. It was all so horrible. "What did they do about it afterwards?" she asked.

"Nothing," was the answer. "The lad's father, Tim Reilly, was too poor to bring suit, and it cost something to move, and they couldn't get anything better for the same price. So they just stayed on, although his wife and the poor old granny almost wept their eyes out at the sight of that staircase for many a month. It was all written up in the papers, with pictures of Terence and the cellar. Lots of people came to look at the house, and there was a piece in the paper saying that the stairway was a death-trap, and that the owner ought to have the charge of murder laid at his door, and that an indignant public demanded that he put in a new one. Mrs. Reilly keeps one of these same papers by her to this day. She keeps it for the picture of Terence that's in it."

"How long was it before he put in the new stairway?" asked Mary, seeing that some response was expected of her.

The old woman leaned over and shook her finger impressively. "It's the gospel truth I'm telling you, never a one has been put in to this day. They just patched up the old one with a few new

planks, and all rotten it is and tearing loose again, as you may see for yourself if you'll follow me."

But Mary refused this invitation also, and a little later took her leave, unutterably depressed by all that she had seen and heard. Mrs. Donegan, with the other women to refresh her memory, had counted up forty funerals which had taken place in Diamond Row in the eleven years that she had lived under its leaky roof.

Mary was through supper that night when Sandford Berry strolled in. "Well," he said, pausing to put his head in at the parlor door, where she sat glancing over the evening paper. "What luck?"

"Oh, it was perfectly hideous!" she exclaimed, and proceeded to pour out the story of her visit so indignantly that he nodded his approval.

"I see that you got your local color all right. It's fairly lurid."

"And I did something else," confessed Mary. "I tried to find the owner of the place, Mr. Stoner, and paint the picture for him. But he was in Europe. So was his wife. And then I found out who his agent was, and I went to him and asked him why he didn't fix the place up. He was as coolly

polite as an iceberg, but he told me in so many words that it was none of my business. That it was his business to look after the interests of his employer and collect the rents, and not to humor the whims of a few fussy women who had more sentiment than sense."

"Then what did *you* say?" laughed Sandford.

Mary's eyes flashed angrily, and her cheeks grew redder and redder as she talked.

"I told him it was not rents alone he was collecting, but blood-money, and that the owner of that tenement was as responsible for the forty deaths inside its walls as if he'd deliberately poisoned them. And I told him I'd *make* it my business from now on to see that the people knew the truth about him. And then I got so mad that I knew I'd burst out crying if I stayed another minute, so I flounced out and left him staring after me open-mouthed, as if I'd flown at him and pecked him."

The reporter laughed again and started on towards the dining-room, but paused to look back with a wise nod of the head, which aggravated Mary quite as much as the knowing tone with which he exclaimed, "I told you so! I told you that when the torch once set you to blazing you'd be the biggest beacon fire in the bunch!"

That night Mary dreamed of that basement room with the mould on the walls and the water seeping in from the adjoining cellar, and of the girl dying of consumption on the musty mattress. And all the forty sufferers who had sickened and died from the unsanitary conditions of the tenement trooped through her dream, and held out their feverish thin hands to her, imploring her to help. And she answered them as she had answered the agent, "I'll *make* it my business. I'll tell your story all over the state and all over the land until the people demand a law to save you."

It was a hot July night, and Mary, waking in her big many-windowed room, sat up almost gasping. She wondered what the heat must be like in those tenement rooms without any windows, with half a dozen or more people crowded into each one. Slipping out of bed she drew a low rocker to the window overlooking the river, and with her arms crossed on the sill, looked out into the darkness. There was only the starlight to-night, and the colored lights of the wharf boats along the bank. She could not see the dim outline of the Kentucky shore, but it was a comfort to know that it was there.

Presently she lifted her head and looked up, her

lips parted and a half frightened throbbing in her ears. It had come over her with an almost overpowering realization that those voices she was hearing were like those which Joan of Arc heard. It was the King's Call summoning her again as it had summoned her at Warwick Hall. Then it was all vague and shadowy, the thing she was to do. Now she knew with what great task she was to keep tryst. She was to help in this struggle to free these poor people from the conditions which bound them. She was to help them reach out for their birthright, which was nothing more than a fair chance to help themselves.

Gazing up at the stars, a great wonder swept over her, that she, little Mary Ware, had been called to a destiny even greater than that of the Maid of Orleans. For was it not greater to enlist a nation in such warfare than to ride at the head of an army and spur men on to bloodshed? This battle, once won, would give not only this generation of helpless poor their chance for health and decent homes, but would lift the handicap from their children and all their children's children who might come after them.

Once, as she sat there, the thought came to her that if she devoted herself to this cause she might

be an old woman before it was accomplished, and that she would have to give up all hope of the home she had long planned to have eventually in the Happy Valley. Even in her exalted mood it seemed a great sacrifice to make, and a long time she sat there, counting the cost.

"To live in scorn of miserable aims that end in self — " She started as if a real voice had spoken in her ear. "That is what mamma used to say so often," she thought. "That is the way *she* lived. But can I keep it up for a whole life-time, clear to the end?"

It was the years that lay behind her which helped her to an answer. The years, which, could they have been marked like Edryn's would have been bejewelled with the tokens of little duties faithfully performed. No pearls showed white like his to mark them, no diamond gleamed where Sorrow's tear had fallen, no amethyst glowed in purple splendor to mark her patient meeting with Defeat, yet she had earned them as truly as he, and in the earning had fitted herself for this fuller fealty.

The sky had lightened until the far shore of the river was dimly visible when she stood up and held out her hands towards it in a mute gesture of sur-

render. Like Edryn she had heard the supreme call, and like him she answered it:

"Oh, heart, and hand of mine, keep tryst!
Keep tryst or die!"

She was still in the same exalted mood when she sat down next day to answer the angry letter which had started her on her search after "local color." All her indignation of the previous day came back, and she pictured the foul conditions of the basement room as realistically as a photographer could have done, ending with the underscored statement:

"The man you are defending is living luxuriously on the rents he collects from this death-trap and others like it, and yet refuses through his agent to drive one nail in it to make it more fit to live in. A man who gives out as alms, with one hand, what he wrings with the other as blood-money from the victims of his miserly greed, deserves to have a trumpet sounded before him as the hypocrites do, and we shall continue to sound it until public sentiment compels him to be as humane as his pretensions."

When Mrs. Blythe came back and found this fiery response on her desk awaiting her signature, she smiled at first, then recognized gratefully that

this burst of indignation meant that a new ally had been born to the cause. But she had to explain tactfully to Mary that while her answer was a just one, it was not wise to anger the man still farther by sending it.

"I shall have to ask you to rewrite that last page," she said regretfully. "Send your description of Diamond Row, just as it is, and the agent's refusal to do anything to better it, but leave out the personal tirade that follows. It may relieve your feelings but it will do the cause harm by arousing an opposition which means the loss of many votes when the question comes up before the Legislature next winter.

"But I'll tell you what I'd like," she added, seeing the shade of disappointment that clouded Mary's face for a second. "I'd like to have that description published in *The Survey,* and I'd like to take you with me this afternoon to the meeting of a committee of the Commercial Club, and have you tell them about this visit, just as you have told it in this letter. It's one of the most realistic things I ever read. It fairly makes my flesh creep in places."

Mary gave a gasp of astonishment, unable to believe at first that Mrs. Blythe was serious. To be pushed forward as a magazine writer and a pub-

lic speaker, both in one day, was too much for her comprehension.

"Oh, Mrs. Blythe! I couldn't make a speech in public!" protested Mary, half frightened at the mere thought.

"I don't want you to," was the placid answer. "I merely want you to come with me and sit at a big table with a dozen or more people around it, and answer the questions that we put to you about what you've seen. You're not afraid to do that, are you?"

"No, if that's all," admitted Mary hesitatingly. "It's never been any trouble for me to do just plain talking. It used to be that my difficulty was I never knew when to quit."

"I'll attend to that part of it," laughed Mrs. Blythe.

So it came about that afternoon that Mary sat at the big directors' table in an upper room of the Commercial Club building, and told once more the story of her visit to the tenement on Myrtle and Tenth Streets. She began it a little hesitatingly, with a quicker beating of pulses and a deepening of color, but gradually she lost her self-consciousness. The inspiration of many interested listeners gave her a sense of power. She was conscious of

the breathless silence in which her story held them. She felt rather than saw that no one stirred, and that they were all moved by the story of the old blind grandmother, grieving over the golden curl that was all that was left to her of the child who was her sunshine. When she mimicked the agent's voice and manner, the ripple of appreciation which passed around the table gratified her more than the applause which followed. It showed that she had made what Sandford Berry would have called "a decided hit."

"You will do it again," Mrs. Blythe said when the meeting was over and they were on their way home, and Mary nodded assent. She didn't mind any amount of "just plain talking," especially when it succeeded in arousing such interest as this first effort had done. She told the same story several times that week in Riverville to small audiences, and then again in Maysport, in a room so large that she had to stand in order to make herself heard. But even then she was not embarrassed, for Mrs. Blythe was standing too. She had turned in the midst of her own talk to say quite naturally, "You tell them about that part of it, Miss Ware. You can make them see it more plainly than I."

Again Mary, in the midst of profound silence,

saw eyes grow misty with sympathy and saw faces light up with indignation at her recital. It never occurred to her to write home that she had spoken in public. She didn't really count it as such, for, as she told Sandford Berry, it wasn't a real speech. It was just as if she had seen a case that needed the attention of a Humane officer, and had stopped in off the street to report it. It was Mrs. Blythe who made the real speeches, who put their duty so clearly before the people of Riverville that before August was over a Better Homes society had been organized, and a score of members enrolled as active workers.

When Mary had time to stop and think, she realized that she was truly in the thick of things at last, for the more she tried to interest people the more necessary she found it to go often to the tenements for fresh pictures of their need. And sometimes a day that began by sending her to a needy family on Myrtle Street, ended by taking her to a musicale or a lawn fête in one of the most beautiful homes of the city. Mrs. Blythe's introduction of her everywhere as her friend, rather than her secretary, would have opened Riverville doors to her of its own self, but, aside from that, Mary won an entrance to many a friendship on her own account. She

was so sincerely interested in everything and everybody, so glad to make friends, so fresh in her enthusiasm, and so attractive in all the healthy vigor of heart and body which a sturdy outdoor life had given her.

CHAPTER IV

"PINK" OR DIAMOND ROW

THE long hot summer was followed by a September so dry and dusty that the town lay parched in the sweltering heat.

"Doesn't it make you feel like a wilted lettuce leaf?" Mary said to Sandford Berry one noon when they met at the boarding-house gate on their way in to dinner. "I've been down to Myrtle Street all morning, and some of those crowded rooms are so stifling that I don't see how the inmates breathe."

"You ought to keep away from them," advised Sandford with a critical glance at her. "They're making you pale and thin. They're getting on your nerves."

"I know it," admitted Mary, "but the more they get on my nerves, the more I feel obliged to go."

She took her place at the table languidly, and merely tasted the iced bouillon which the waitress put before her. She felt faint and needed food, but it was hard to force herself to swallow while the

smell of the unwholesome places she had visited seemed still in her nostrils. The remembrance of some of them rose sickeningly before her and she pushed her plate aside.

"You take my advice and stay away from those places," said Sandford again, noticing the movement. "What's the use of wearing your sympathies to a frazzle over what can't be helped? They're sapping the life out of you, and you're doing them no good — that is, no lasting good. It only affords temporary relief."

"You know nothing about what I am doing," retorted Mary, irritated by his comments and provoked at herself for feeling irritation over what she knew was prompted by friendly interest. Yet when she went to her room after having barely tasted her dinner, she stood a moment in front of the mirror, recalling his remarks. She had to admit that the first was true. There were blue shadows under her eyes. All the fresh color and the sparkle was gone from her face. She looked as she felt, worn and exhausted.

"But I *am* doing them some good," she protested to herself, and in proof of it took from a drawer the little memorandum book in which she set down her daily expenses. She went back over

the accounts of the month just past. Nothing for herself except board and carfare, but the other entries filled several pages: "Ice, fresh eggs, cream, beef juice, ice, alcohol, towels, ice —"

Each time the word ice met her eye she recalled the parched lips that had moaned for it, the feverish hands that had clutched it so greedily when she brought it, and she thought if Sandford Berry could only see what she had done for some of the poor souls who "got on her nerves" he'd change his opinion about her efforts to help them being of no avail. But the next moment a mood of depression seized her, weighing down on her so heavily that hot tears started to her eyes.

"He's right! It isn't of any lasting good," she thought. "It's like the ice that brings relief for a moment, but is melted and gone the next! And my salary is all gone, and so is nearly everything that I saved the month before. There isn't a dollar left to my credit in the savings bank. What *is* the use of going on this way, when all one can do amounts to no more than a drop in the bucket?"

Mary had sat up late the night before, finishing a lot of letters that Mrs. Blythe was anxious to have mailed as soon as possible. It was midnight when she covered her typewriter, and the heat and

a stray mosquito which had eluded both Mrs. Crum and the screens, made her wakeful and restless. That accounted for her physical exhaustion, while the experiences of the morning were enough to send her spirits to the lowest ebb.

She told herself over and over, as she lay across the bed and tried to reason herself into a more cheerful frame of mind, that it was only natural that she should feel as she did, and that when she was rested the world would look as bright as usual. On account of her late work the night before, Mrs. Blythe had given her nothing to do to-day. It was to see protégés of her own that Mary had gone to the tenements. She might have passed the morning with a book, down on the bank of the river under the willows, where there was a cooling breath now and then from the water. But, haunted by Elsie Whayne's hollow-eyed little face, she could not go off and enjoy her holiday alone in comfort.

For weeks Elsie had seemed burning up with a slow fever, and it was for her Mary had spent the last of her salary on alcohol for cooling rubs, and for ice and for some thin, soft ready-made gowns. Poor little country-bred Elsie, who had cried over her line of gray clothes because she could not wash them clean in the scanty amount of water allotted

to each room in the crowded house, cried again over the snowy whiteness of the new gowns. They were such a joy to her that it was pitiful to hear her exclamations over them.

And Mary, seeing the wreck that fever had made of the pretty child, who had come to the tenement abloom with health, wrote down one more black crime against the man who was responsible for the fever, because he would not clean up the plague-infested spots on which it fed and grew.

It is bad enough to be ill when one has every luxury in a quiet room to oneself, where deft-fingered nurses keep noiseless watch to minister to the slightest need; but to suffer as the children of the tenements must, with not even a whole bed to oneself sometimes, oh, the pity of it! And to have to lie as some of them do, all through the stifling days, panting and gasping in the fumes of an ill-smelling lamp, because the four dark walls have not a single window — oh, the shame of it!

Mary never encountered the first sight without wishing impulsively that her eyes had never been opened to such things. She was so much happier before she knew that such conditions existed in the world. But she never came across the second that a sort of fierce joy did not take possession of her

at the thought that she *did* know, and that she was helping in a fight to wipe out such dreadful holes, which are all that some families have to call home.

She fell asleep presently, and lay motionless until a banana man went by in the street below, with loud cries of his wares underneath her window. Then she roused up with a start, to find herself cramped from long lying in one position with her clothes on.

"I might as well make myself comfortable and spend the whole afternoon resting," she concluded; so slipping off her dress, she opened the closet door to take down a long white kimono which hung on one of the back hooks. In reaching around to get it she upset a pile of boxes on the corner shelf, and one of them tumbled open at her feet. It was full of odds and ends which she did not use often, and as she replaced them her attention was called to the box itself. It was the big one that Lieutenant Boglin had brought to the train filled with candy, the morning that they left San Antonio.

How far away that time seemed, and how far Bogey had dropped out of her life: Bogey and Gay and Roberta and all those other good friends who had filled such a big place in her thoughts. She hadn't heard from any of them for months, and lately she had scarcely thought of them. For that

matter Jack and Norman and Joyce and Phil had dropped far into the background. They were no longer her first thought on waking, and the most constant thought throughout the day. It was a different world she was living in now. She wondered what old Captain Doane would think of it; and Pink Upham — Then she smiled, remembering that it had been weeks since she had given a thought to either of them. And yet, only three months before they had been a part of her daily living and thinking at Lone-Rock.

All at once a longing for the clean, quiet little haven up in the hills came over her like an ache. She was homesick for the restful mountains, where there were no slums, no fever-infested spots such as she had been in all morning, no loathsome mouldy walls, no dank, foul odors. She pictured the little home not as it stood when last she saw it, brightened with all Betty's bridal gifts, with Betty as mistress, but as it was at that last Christmas reunion, in all its dear shabby homeliness. The sun shone in across the clean faded carpet, and every old chair held out its arms in friendly welcome.

She could see herself stepping around the kitchen getting supper. How shiningly clean everything was! What peace brooded over the place, and what

a deep sense of calm and well-being and contentment pervaded it. And her mother sat by the window, looking up from her sewing now and then to smile or speak. Sometimes she hummed softly to herself some old tune like Hebron:

"Thus far the Lord hath led me on —
Thus far His power prolongs my days!"

Burying her face in the pillow, Mary cried softly for what could never be again. It seemed to her, for that heart-breaking little while, that all the heaven she could ever ask would be just to go back to the little home and find it as it used to be, with her mother there, and Jack and Norman, nothing changed. She longed to spend the rest of her life right there in that cottage which she had once been so anxious to get away from, doing the same tasks, day after day, that had once seemed so trivial and monotonous. She lay there picturing the whole scene, making herself more miserable every instant, yet finding a sorrowful sort of pleasure in thus torturing herself.

She could recall the very pattern of the oil-cloth on the kitchen floor, the brown crocks, the yellow mixing-bowl, the little black-handled knife she always pared the vegetables with. One by one she

took them up. She went the whole narrow round of things, from kindling the fire in the stove with the fresh-smelling pine chips in the box, to putting the tea to brew in the fat little earthenware pot that had been one of Grandmother Ware's treasures. She drew the biscuits from the oven, and brought up the cream and butter from the spotless white cellar. How good and fresh they looked! How good and fresh they tasted!

Faint from having eaten no dinner, it made her sob to think how hungry she was, with a hunger that nothing could appease, since what she wanted most existed only in memory now. She went on with her pictures, summoning the family to the table, hearing Norman's answering whoop from the woodshed, and Jack's hearty "All right! I'll be there in a jiffy, Sis!" Then she sobbed harder than ever, remembering that her summons could never again be answered by an unbroken circle.

Presently, exhausted by the heat, her long fast and her crying spell, she fell into a deep sleep. The banana man passed back again under her window, calling his wares as loudly as before, but she did not hear him. An Italian with a hand-organ stopped in front of the house and ground out several popular noisy airs, but no note of it reached

her. There was a dog fight on the corner, a terrific pow-wow of yelps and snarls; still she did not stir. Two, three hours went by. Then she was aroused by a rustling sound at her door, and opening her eyes, saw that some one was slipping a letter under it.

She lay blinking at it lazily for a moment, then, hanging over the side of the bed as far as she could without falling out, tried to pick it up. It was just beyond her reach, but with the aid of a slipper she managed to touch it and drag it near enough to get her fingers on to it. Doubling up the pillow under her head, she lay back, leisurely scanning the envelope. It was post-marked Lone-Rock, and she knew by a glance at the heavily shaded flourishes of the address that it was from Pink Upham.

Earlier in the week, when Riverville was the boundary of her interests, a letter from him would have had scant attention. But coming at this time, when a homesick mood brought the old life so vividly before her that it had suddenly become very dear and desirable, she opened it eagerly. It was the first one she had received from him, for she had told him on leaving Lone-Rock that she could not correspond with him; that she would be too busy with Mrs. Blythe's letters to write many of her own.

As she glanced down the first page she saw why he had disregarded her wishes. He had news of such great importance to himself that he naturally expected her to take a friendly interest in it. She smiled with pleasure as she read. Good old Pink! He deserved to have things come his way. If she hadn't spent so much for the relief of Diamond Row, she would have been tempted to send him a telegram of congratulation. It would please him immensely, she knew. A mine in which he had a small amount of stock that was regarded as almost worthless, had suddenly proved to be valuable, and he had been offered so much for his shares that he could buy out the Company's store at Lone-Rock and build a house bigger and better in every way than Mr. Moredock's. He had closed the deal and bought the store, and he would build the house if — here Mary turned another page — *if she would consent to become Mrs. Pinckney Upham.*

Mary sat straight up in bed, the better to reread this startling paragraph. Her face colored slowly as she rapidly scanned what followed. It was a manly letter, although here and there it sounded as if phrases and whole sentences had been copied from some Guide to Etiquette and Social Correspondence. She had filled his life entirely from the first day

of their acquaintance, he told her. She had been an inspiration, a guiding star to all that was high and noble. He loved her devotedly, humbly and more greatly than any woman had ever been loved before, and his whole life should be given to making her happy.

When she had finished, Mary lay back on the pillow and stared out of the window into the branches of a sycamore tree that leaned across it. A very tender feeling crept up into her heart for this man who was offering her so much. She had not realized before what a beautiful, what a solemn thing it was to be counted first in somebody's life; to know that she really was its guiding star, its inspiration. At this distance Pink's little mannerisms, which had always annoyed her, shrank out of sight, and she remembered only how considerate he was, how carefully he remembered every wish, how important he regarded her slightest word. It would be lovely to be taken care of always by one who would do it in such fashion; to be shielded and considered, and surrounded with every comfort that a boundless affection could suggest.

Again it came over Mary with overwhelming force how good it would be to go back to the clean, sweet life of the hills; the simple, wholesome coun-

try life that she loved, and never again have to help lift the burden of other people's poverty, or puzzle over the problem of their wrongs. For a little space she lay and imagined what it would be like to be back in Lone-Rock, in the new house Pink would build for her. She could picture that, for she knew that every detail would be planned to accord with her wishes, and she could see just the way it would be furnished, and how she would make it the centre of hospitality and good cheer for all of Lone-Rock; and how she and Betty would visit back and forth, and the family celebrations they'd have on anniversaries and holidays. All this she could see quite clearly and pleasantly. She could even see Pink on the other side of a little table spread for two, praising her muffins, and carefully cutting out the choicest parts of the tenderloin for her. She was positive he would do both.

That might be very pleasant for a few times, but suppose they should live to celebrate their silver wedding? Alack for Pink, that a mental arithmetic problem suddenly popped into her mind!

If there are three meals in one day, and three hundred and sixty-five days in one year, in twenty-five years through how many meals would they have to sit opposite each other? She did not try to mul-

tiply the numbers, only whispered in a sort of groan, "there'd be thousands and thousands! I don't believe I could stand it, for no matter how good and kind he is, there's no denying it, his visits always begin to bore me before they're half over!"

She got up and began to dress presently, stopping twice in the process to reread the letter, once with her hair hanging, once with her dress slipped half way on. She wanted to make sure of some sentences which she could not entirely recall.

"I wonder what mamma would say," she thought, wistfully. She walked over to the mantel, where a photograph of Mrs. Ware stood in a silver frame. It was one which Joyce had colored, and was so life-like that Mary's eyes often sought it questioningly. Now she leaned towards it, gazing into the sweet face that seemed to smile helpfully back at her until she found the answer to her own question.

"You always liked him," she whispered. "You always saw the best in him and made excuses for him. You would have been so happy to have had me settle in Lone-Rock if you had been there. But I *couldn't* care for him as you did for papa, and it wouldn't be right unless I did."

She did not answer the letter then. Just as she

"GAZING INTO THE SWEET FACE THAT SEEMED TO SMILE HELPFULLY BACK AT HER."

was sitting down to supper a telephone message came from Mrs. Blythe, saying that they would call for her in a little while to take her out on the river for a moonlight ride. Mary was glad that the excursion was on one of the big steamboats instead of a little launch, for in the larger party gathered on it, no one noticed when she wandered off by herself and sat apart, leaning against the deck railing, and gazing dreamily over the shining water. She wanted to be alone. She wanted to think of some way to answer Pink, which would hurt him as little as possible. She knew just how he would stride into the post-office and unlock the drawer that held her letter, and how his face would brighten when he saw it. He always did show so plainly everything he felt. And then the grim hurt look would come into his eyes, and she knew just how his mouth would straighten into a grim line when he read it. Oh, for his sake she wished that she didn't have to tell him that what he wanted with all his good, big, generous heart could never be.

Was it the band playing *Kathleen Mavourneen,* or was it something else that suddenly made her think of Phil and her parting promise to him at Bauer. Some one *had* come asking her to join his trail, just as Phil had prophesied, but she needn't

keep her promise in this case, because there was only one answer possible. She would stick to her own trail and go on her way alone. But — there was a queer little thrill of comfort in the thought — somehow it was nice to know that somebody wanted you, and that you didn't *have* to be an old maid. She would keep that letter always, her first and, probably, her last proposal.

Again the band was repeating that refrain of *Kathleen Mavourneen,* and the notes rang out tremulously sweet over the water:

"Oh, why art thou silent, thou voice of my heart?"

She recalled the scrap of music Phil had torn out and sent to her with that question on it, and that suggested the other song, *Bonnie Eloise,* whose name he had given to the girl with the greyhound. She wondered if Phil ever wrote to her now. Maybe at this very moment he was sitting in his bachelor quarters down in Mexico, looking out at the moonlight and dreaming about Eloise. She hoped not, for somehow, without cause or reason, she had conceived a strong dislike for her.

Some friends of Mrs. Blythe's came hunting Mary just then, to carry her off to the hurricane deck, where something of especial interest was

going on. There was no more time for serious meditation, and the combination of youth and mirth and moonlight worked its magical charm. By the time the boat had made its return trip, Mary was restored to her usual normal self, and to the equanimity that the heat and the slums and Pink's letter had upset. When the lights of the town streamed out across the river to meet them, she was rested and refreshed, ready to take up the next day's work with her usual enthusiasm.

It was late when she reached home, but her long sleep in the afternoon made her wakeful, and she sat up till after midnight trying to compose a satisfactory answer to Pink's letter. It was a depressing task, and she tore up page after page, in her effort to make her refusal as kind as possible, and yet to make him understand that it was final.

When it was finished and sealed she drew another envelope towards her, intending to address it to Phil. Then she hesitated and pushed it aside, saying:

"I'd better wait until I'm in a more cheerful frame of mind. If I write now it'll be so full of slums and disappointments that it'll give him the doldrums."

CHAPTER V

MARY AND THE "BIG OPPORTUNITY"

THE cheerful frame of mind came soon, but it was nearly a month before that letter was written. Unlike the others which preceded it, this one was not thrust under the rubber band that held the many missives from "The Little Vicar." It was slipped into Phil's pocket; for the package, with all the rest of the contents of the private drawer in his desk, reposed in the bottom of his trunk. His work in Mexico was done and he was starting back to the States.

He had expected to buy his ticket straight through to New York, and retrace his steps as far as Lloydsboro Valley later. Rob Moore had written him that Lloyd was arranging for a house-party during the Thanksgiving holidays, and that he and Alex Shelby and Mary Ware were to be included among the guests, and for him to make his plans accordingly.

Mary's letter also mentioned this house-party.

She had been invited but could not accept. She had been too extravagant the month before, she told him in a joking way.

"I have squandered my princely income on paltry trifles, and now must pay the penalty. I must see the door of Paradise slam in my face and shut me away into outer darkness. But, seriously, even if I could afford the trip, I could not take so much time. Mrs. Blythe needs me. We are straining every nerve to accomplish certain things before the next session of the Legislature, when the bill for better housing is to be brought up. Oh, I am sure that you understand, knowing how I love the Valley and the blessed people in it, that a house-party at Oaklea, just that alone, would be little short of heaven for me. But to meet the Best Man there, and Kitty Walton and Katie Mallard and all the rest — well, I can't talk about it calmly. The thought of missing it is too grievous to mention in public. Enough said. Only the lonely pillow and the midnight hour shall hear my plaint.

"I couldn't possibly bear the disappointment if we were not so busy. Mrs. Blythe is massing her forces like a major-general, and I am too deeply interested in the fight to let my personal affairs stand in the way. Three months ago, in my inno-

cence and ignorance, I could not have believed that any fight would be necessary. I would have taken it for granted that all one had to do was to put the plain facts before the public and show what a danger and disgrace such houses are to a community, and it would rise up of its own accord to change conditions. I was utterly amazed when I found that there are respectable men who not only will do nothing to help, but will throw all their weight on the other side, and spend hundreds of dollars to prevent the passage of such a law.

"And I've learned a lot about politics, too. I've come to see that it's just a great, greedy hand, reaching out to get the best of everything for itself. You don't see how it *could* want to interfere with anything like giving people decenter houses to live in, and wiping the causes of disease out of the world, but it does, and it dips in just where you'd least expect it. That is why Mrs. Blythe is so anxiously watching the results of the city election, which is to be held next week.

"Mr. Stoner, the owner of Diamond Row, is one of the candidates for office, and if he gets in he'll have it in his power to pull lots of wires against us in the Legislature. There is almost no hope of defeating him. Don't think that Mrs. Blythe has

gone in personally for politics or anything like that, because she hasn't. But she has waked up a lot of influential people to work for her cause, and induced one of the foremost men in the senate to introduce the bill. Also she has managed to get an invitation to explain it all to a big audience that will be in the Opera House next week, before the election.

"We are so excited over that, for it is one of the Big Opportunities that we hope will count for a great deal. She has a love of a new gown to wear, and a big black hat with plumes, and her speech is certainly soul-stirring. I wish you could hear her. It's nothing but 'the short and simple annals of the poor,' but when she gets done there won't be 'a dry eye in the house.' That's the highest praise that the Riverville *Herald* can give, and it gives it to her so often that it has become a household joke at the Blythes."

When Phil slipped this letter into his pocket he had changed his mind about buying a ticket to New York. He had decided to take a roundabout route by way of Riverville, with the privilege of a short stop-over. He intended that Mary should be one of the guests at the house-party, and he knew that the only way to persuade her was to go in person

and answer each objection as it was raised. She had written jokingly of her disappointment, but her very effort to make light of it seemed pathetic to him, and showed him how deeply she felt it.

All the way up from Mexico his thoughts kept drifting back to her. He wondered if he would find her greatly changed. She had passed through so much in the time he had been away, yet he was sure that he would find her the same sturdy, valiant little soul that had challenged his admiration when she was a child. He wondered what effect her mother's death had had upon her, and what had been the outcome of her association with a woman like Mrs. Blythe, one who made addresses in public. He hoped that Mary wouldn't imbibe any strong-minded, women's rights notions to detract from her feminine charm. He was glad she had mentioned so enthusiastically the "love of a gown, and the big, black plumed hat" that Mrs. Blythe was to wear.

It would take a great deal to eradicate Mary's love of pretty clothes. That trait of hers had always amused him. He recalled more than one Sunday at Ware's Wigwam when she insisted on putting on her "rosebud sash" to wear walking on the

desert, when there was nothing but the owls and the jack-rabbits to take notice. And he recalled the big hat-box she had squeezed into the automobile that day in New York, when he took the girls out to the Wayside Inn, and how blissfully she peeped at the lilac-trimmed concoction within from time to time.

A hot box delayed Phil's train awhile on the first day of his journey, and a disabled engine on another, so that he missed the St. Louis connection, and was a day late getting into Riverville. It happened most unfortunately for his plans and the limited time he had to spare, that it was the very day of the "Big Opportunity," when Mrs. Blythe was to speak in the Opera House, to a crowd which would assemble to hear several other speakers, one of national importance.

Phil did not discover this until after he had reached the hotel. He wanted his meeting with Mary to be as great a surprise to her as it had been the day he met her coming across the field of bluebonnets in Bauer. But he also wanted to be sure of finding her at home when he called. So while he waited for his late luncheon to be served, he walked into the telephone booth and called up the boarding-house. Mrs. Crum took his message, with

the answer that Miss Ware had not been at the house for over a week. She had been so busy that she was spending her nights as well as her days with Mrs. Blythe, and probably would not return to her room for another week. She advised him to call up Mr. Dudley Blythe's residence.

The maid answered his ring at that place, and asked that he leave a message for Mrs. Blythe, who was resting and could not be disturbed, as she was to speak at the Opera House in a little while. Miss Ware? No, the maid could not say where she was, but had heard her say something had happened which called her down on Myrtle Street. She knew that Mrs. Blythe had arranged to meet her there in her auto on her way to the Opera House. Probably they would be back about six o'clock.

Phil hung up the receiver impatiently. He hadn't come all the way from Mexico to listen to a speech on housing reform, but, under the circumstances, he had no other choice if he was to find Mary before dark. Then he laughed outright, thinking of her amazement if she should happen to catch sight of him in the audience. He supposed she would naturally sit near the front, and he could easily locate her. He didn't dare run the risk of suddenly sitting down beside her. One never knew

what Mary would say or do when very much surprised. It would be better to send an usher with a note, asking her to meet him at the entrance and then — well, Mary should decide how and where they should spend the rest of the afternoon together. It was a chilly, gray day in early November, a trifle cold either for an auto spin or a ride on the river. But they must go to some place where they could have a long, uninterrupted talk, and he could tell her all he had come to Riverville to say.

With his pulses quickening at the thought, he left the hotel for a brisk walk along the river, until time to go to the place of meeting.

Meanwhile Mary was having an exciting experience down at Diamond Row. A message had called her there just as they arose from the lunch-table.

"Oh, why couldn't it have come sooner," she mourned, "before I was all dressed up so spick and span for your grand speechifying occasion? I always feel as if I ought to be fumigated when I come back from there. More than likely it's just another complaint that old Mrs. Donegan wants to lodge against the universe. She seems to think lately that it owes her a special grudge, and that my

ears are Heaven-ordained funnels for her to pour her troubles into."

But it was not Mrs. Donegan's troubles this time which summoned her, although that excitable old woman met her, crying and wringing her hands. It was for a neighbor's misfortunes that she invoked Mary's aid. Dena Barowsky, a frail girl in the room above hers, who supported a family by her work in the factory, had had a bad fall.

"Both legs broken and all hurted inside she is!" wailed Mrs. Donegan, eager to be the first to tell the bad news.

"Where is she?" asked Mary. "Where did it happen? At the factory?"

Half a dozen eager voices interrupted each other to tell her. It seemed as if all the inmates of the tenement had gathered on the stairs and the landing to discuss the accident in sympathizing little groups. It was something which might have happened to any one of them. Dena Barowsky had come home from the factory at noon to fix a bite and sup for her old father, who was worse than usual, and while going down the rickety stairs to the cellar for some reason, had fallen. A loose board had tripped her, so that she pitched against the bannister, which was so rotten that it broke

under her weight, and she fell headlong into the cellar.

A doctor was in the room with her now, examining to find how badly she was hurt, Mrs. Donegan explained. The saints only knew what would become of the family if it should be so that she was laid up long. Her father was bedridden, and her mother so queer in her head that she did nothing but sit in a corner and mutter to herself all day long. Luckily there wasn't more than a foot of water in the cellar, and they got her out right away. It had been half full when little Terence Reilly fell in, for that was the time of the backwater in the spring freshets.

Following half a dozen self-appointed guides, Mary picked her way to the stairway and looked down. The broken piece of rotten timber, the gaping hole in the splintered bannister, the dark gleam of the water beneath, told their own story. One long, horrified look was enough for Mary. The others hung over the spot as if it held some unexplainable fascination, pointing out the step which tripped her first, the rusty nail to which still clung a shred of her dress torn out in falling, the jagged splinter that must have been the one which made the gash in her face.

With a shudder Mary turned away and asked to be taken to Dena's room. At the opening of the door a strong odor of anæsthetics rose above the mouldy smell of the unventilated apartment, which was made still closer by the inquisitive neighbors whom the doctor's orders had not been able to bar out. Despite his sternness they gathered in the corners, watching the white-faced girl on the bed. She was moaning, though unconscious. This was not the first time Mary had met the young doctor in such places. He looked up with evident relief at her entrance.

"It's a case for a district nurse," he said, when he had explained briefly in a low tone the seriousness of the injuries. He spoke purposely in medical terms so that the old father, sobbing childishly on the opposite bed, could not understand the gravity of the situation.

"I'll find the nurse at once and send her just as soon as possible," promised Mary. "I can telephone from the corner grocery."

She hurried out, thankful for the Organized Charities which made such help possible, and remembering with a queer mixture of resentment and gratitude that it was the owner of this disgraceful Diamond Row, Mr. Stoner himself, who had made

such a generous contribution to the Association that they were able to hire an extra nurse for this part of town.

"If he had only gone at the root of the matter," wailed Mary, inwardly, "and used the 'ounce of prevention,' there would have been no need for this great 'pound of cure.' There wouldn't have been this dreadful accident."

At the foot of the landing she was halted again by old Mrs. Donegan, who was haranguing an interested crowd while she waited for Mary's appearance. She was waving a time-yellowed and tattered newspaper in their faces, and calling attention to the headlines and pictures on the front page.

"We want you should take it to Mrs. Blythe, and let her put it in the great speech she'll be after making this day. The whole town ought to know what happened this ten years gone on account of that same stairway. Mrs. Reilly didn't want to let the paper go. She couldn't bear the thought of losing that picture of little Terence. But I took it from her, and told her you'd never let it out of your hands till you brought it back safe to her. That it was for the good of us all you'd be using it."

The telephone was in use when Mary entered the

grocery, and while she waited for her turn, she glanced through the paper that Mrs. Donegan had thrust into her hands. She had already seen the marked account of the funeral on one of her visits to old Mrs. Reilly, for she had been asked on that trying occasion to read it aloud; but she had not read until now the article on the opposite page, which gave a graphic description of the tenement in which the accident occurred, and which indignantly called attention to the criminal negligence which had caused the death of a tenant. No names were given, but Mary knew that Burke Stoner owned the premises then, and that in the ten years he had collected nearly fifty thousand dollars in rents from the inmates of Diamond Row. She had been busy collecting statistics as well as other kinds of information since her first interview with his agent, and the recording angel was not the only one who had a long list of black figures set down against his name. Mary kept hers on a page by itself in a neat little memorandum book, biding her time to sound the promised trumpet before him.

It was a very grim and determined Mary who came out of the corner grocery five minutes later. She had been able to locate the nurse much sooner than she expected to, and was on her way back to

Dena's room to report that help was coming. And when a little later the honk of Mrs. Blythe's machine sounded at the curbstone in front of Diamond Row, she climbed into her seat beside her friend without a glance at the new gown and the picture hat she was wearing for the first time. That omission in itself showed Mrs. Blythe that something was wrong, for usually Mary was keenly interested in her appearance, and never failed to express her admiration of anything which she especially admired.

"What's gone wrong?" asked Mrs. Blythe, as they whirled around a corner and turned into a pleasanter part of the town.

For once Mary waited before speaking, taking a deep breath and pressing her lips tightly together. Then she answered in a tense way:

"I feel as if I'd witnessed a murder! I can't get poor Dena's moans out of my ears, nor the sight of that broken stairway with the water underneath out of my mind!" Then reminded by the perplexed expression of Mrs. Blythe's face that she was talking in riddles, she gave an account of the accident, and repeated old Mrs. Donegan's plea that the story of the staircase with its double tragedy be told that afternoon, in order that public senti-

ment might be aroused in behalf of the people of the tenements.

"I wish it had been Mr. Stoner himself who fell through those rotten stairs!" stormed Mary, her face white with indignation and her eyes blazing angrily. "I never felt such a mighty wrath rise up in me before! I could stop right here on the street corner and call out his name so all the town could hear. I'd like to shout 'Here's your model citizen! Here's the kind, benevolent man who buys your praise with his gifts to the poor. Look what he has done for the Reillys and for Dena!' It isn't as if he didn't know what condition the place is in. He'd been warned that the steps were unsafe, even before the first accident. And to think he let it go on ten years after it had been condemned and cost one life —"

She stopped abruptly, finding words futile to express her feelings, and Mrs. Blythe, taking the crumpled sheet, hastily scanned it. They were turning into Main Street when she finished, and with a glance at the clock in the front of the car she told the chauffeur to go around by Mr. Blythe's office.

"It may make us a little late for the first speech," she said, "but I must ask Mr. Blythe's advice. I

shall tell this story of the two accidents of course. It will illustrate one point I am trying to make better than anything else I could say. But I don't know how personal I ought to make it. It would be a centre shot at the enemy, and *might* help to defeat Stoner in the election day after to-morrow if I could mention him by name, and emphasize the big rents he collects from those working girls and factory men, but it may not be wise for me to do it, in the interest of the bill. It might antagonize all his party, as he is one of the most influential of the local bosses. I must ask Mr. Blythe just how far I can go."

Two minutes later they stopped at the office, and Mary, watching from her seat in the car, saw Mrs. Blythe go in and the stenographer rise hurriedly from her desk beside the big front window, and come forward. Evidently what she was telling Mrs. Blythe was very unexpected and agitating, for she came out looking pale and frightened, and spoke only the one word, "Home," as she sank back limply in her seat.

"Dudley was taken suddenly ill a little while ago," she explained in hurried gasps. "Miss Nellie says it was something like an apoplectic stroke. They have been telephoning everywhere to find me.

It must have happened just as I left the house. They have taken him home in an ambulance. Hurry, Hardy!"

Except for Mary's shocked exclamation of sympathy and alarm, no word was spoken until the house was reached. Mary ran up the stairs with Mrs. Blythe, stood a moment in the upper hall when the other left her, and then went on to the alcove at the end, which had been fitted up as a little office. There she sat down to wait. Three physicians, personal friends of Dudley Blythe, were in the room with him. The housemaid was running back and forth getting what was necessary, and the next door neighbor had come in.

There was nothing that Mary could do, and the moments of waiting seemed endless. A programme of the afternoon's meeting lay on the desk, and from time to time she glanced at it nervously, and then at the clock. The time for the first speech passed. The second one must have been well under way when Mrs. Blythe came out into the hall and saw her sitting in the alcove. Mary started up and went towards her impulsively, both hands out.

"Oh, isn't there something I can do?" she whispered.

"Not in there," was the answer in a low tone.

"The doctors give me every encouragement to believe that he will come out of this all right, but I don't know — I'm so frightened and upset."

She passed her hand across her eyes, as if trying to remember something, then exclaimed, "It's just come to me! I had forgotten about that meeting. It's almost time for me to go on to speak, but, of course, I can't do that now. I couldn't leave him in the critical condition he is in, no matter what is at stake. There's only one thing to do, and that is to send you in my place. *You'll* have to go, Mary, and tell them why I couldn't come, and explain what it is that — "

"Oh, Mrs. Blythe!" interrupted Mary, aghast. "I *couldn't!* I couldn't possibly! There's not a moment to prepare for it!"

"But you *must,*" was the answer in a tone so firm and compelling that it brooked no denial.

"There's no other way out — you know every phase of the situation. You've explained it over and over in your letters and to small audiences. Your sympathies have just been worked up to white heat by Dena's accident — Oh, you're *splendidly* prepared, and you can't fail me now, Mary. Not at a time like this!"

Her voice broke and the tears came into her

eyes, at which sight Mary drew one deep breath and surrendered.

"Well — I'll do the best I can," she promised, "but I've barely time to get there."

With one squeeze of the hands which she had caught in hers, Mrs. Blythe released her, saying gratefully, "Oh, I knew you wouldn't fail me! Go — and Godspeed!"

Breathless, speechless, Mary found herself climbing into the automobile, with a dazed feeling, as if some one had sounded an alarm of fire and she was blindly fumbling her way through smoke. In a vague way she was conscious that she was facing one of the big moments of her life, and she wondered why, when she needed to centre all her thoughts on the ordeal that confronted her, they should slip backward to a trivial thing that had happened years ago at Lloydsboro Valley.

It was at the tableau at The Beeches, when the curtain was rising on the scene of Elaine the Lily Maid, lying on her funeral barge, in her right hand the lily, in her left the letter. Miss Casey, the reader, had lost her copy of the poem, and everything was going wrong because there was no one to explain the tableau, and Mary sprang to the rescue. She could hear her own voice ringing out,

beginning the story: "And that day there was dole in Astalot!" And she could feel the Little Colonel's arms around her afterward, as she cried, "You were a perfect darling to save the day that way." And Phil had come up and called her a brick and the heroine of the evening. Now she wondered why that scene in detail should come back so vividly, until something seemed to tell her she was to take it as a sort of prophecy that she was to be as successful in her second rising to meet an emergency as she was in her first.

When she entered the side door of the hall, the speaker whose place on the programme immediately preceded Mrs. Blythe's had just taken his seat in the midst of hearty applause, and the orchestra had begun a short selection. In the shelter of some large palms at the side of the stage she gave the chairman Mrs. Blythe's message, and sat down to wait. The orchestra sounded as if it were miles away. She had often used the expression, a sea of faces. As she looked across the expanse of those upturned before her now, they seemed indeed a sea, and took on a wave-like motion that made her dizzy. Then she happened to glance down at the little signet ring she always wore. "By the bloodstone on her finger" she must fail not in prov-

ing that undaunted courage was the jewel of her soul.

When she looked out again, through the screen of palms, she could distinguish individual faces in the great mass. There was Judge Brown and Senator Ripley and Doctor Haverhill. And down in front, at the reporters' table, was Orphant Annie. She couldn't help smiling as she anticipated his surprise when he should see her taking Mrs. Blythe's place. He was so close that he had already caught sight of her, and his pale, prominent eyes were gazing at her with a solemn, quizzical expression which made her smile. The thought of the surprise in store for him steadied her nerves, and as she began to enjoy the humor of the situation, gradually the loud knocking at her heart quieted. The buzzing in her ears stopped. Her icy cold hands, which she had been holding clenched, relaxed and grew warm again, and she came consciously out of what seemed to be a waking dream.

Then the call of the hour marshalled all the forces of her mind in orderly array. The vital words to say, the vital thing to do stood clearly before her. With her fear all gone she looked out across the house waiting for her summons to speak. When she rose it was with Mrs. Blythe's "Godspeed"

giving her courage. When she went forward, it was with the exalted feeling of a soldier into whose hand a falling general has thrust a sword, and commanded him to take a rampart. She would do it or die.

CHAPTER VI

PHIL WALKS IN

Meanwhile, Phil Tremont, on the outer edge of the big audience, looked in vain for Mary or for some one answering to the description she had given of Mrs. Blythe. Several times he shifted his seat, slipping farther around towards the stage. In one of the brief intervals between speeches, while the orchestra played, he questioned an usher, and found that Mrs. Blythe had not yet arrived, and that when she came she would probably wait in one of the wings until time to be introduced to the audience.

With an impatient glance at his watch he changed his seat once more, this time to one in the section nearest the stage, but still in a back row. He wanted to make sure of seeing Mary before she could see him. He decided that if she did not make her appearance by the time Mrs. Blythe arrived he would go back behind the scenes and look for her. Maybe Mrs. Blythe would station her there some-

where as prompter, for fear that she might forget her speech. If that were the case it would be a pity to distract the prompter's attention, but it was a greater pity that the few hours he had to spend with her should be wasted in idle waiting.

Several people who had glanced up admiringly at the handsome stranger when he took his seat, watched with interest his growing impatience. It was evident that he was anxiously waiting for some one, from the way he alternately scanned the entrance, looked at his watch and referred to the programme. When Mrs. Blythe's name on it was reached he leaned forward, clutching the back of the chair in front of him impatiently till the chairman came to the front of the stage.

The next instant such an audible exclamation of surprise broke from him that several rows of heads were turned inquiringly in his direction. He felt his face burn, partly from having attracted so much attention to himself, partly from the surprise of the moment. For following the chairman came not the dainty little Mrs. Blythe in her love of a new gown and the big plumed hat, but Mary herself. There was such a pounding in Phil's ears that he scarcely heard the chairman's explanation of Mrs. Blythe's absence, and his announcement that Miss

Ware had brought a message from her to which they would now listen.

Several curious emotions possessed him in turn, after his first overwhelming surprise. One was a little twinge of resentment at her speaking in public. Not that he was opposed to other women doing it, but somehow he wished that she hadn't attempted it. Then he felt the anxiety and sense of personal responsibility one always has when a member of one's own family is in the limelight. No matter how competent he may be to rise to the occasion, there is always the lurking dread that he may fail to acquit himself creditably.

Phil had been thinking of Mary as he saw her that last morning in Bauer, all a-giggle and a-dimple and aglow, romping around the kitchen with Norman, till the tinware clattered on the walls. But it was a very different Mary who faced him now, with the old newspaper in her hand and the story of Dena's wrongs burning to be told on her lips. It is proof of how well she told it that her opening sentence brought a hush over the great audience and held it in absolute silence to the end. And yet she told it so simply, so personally, that it was as if she had merely opened a door into Diamond Row and bidden them see for themselves

the windowless rooms, the mouldy walls, the slimy yards, Elsie Whayne and Dena, and the old grandmother fondling the sunny curls of little Terence.

When she finished, old Judge Brown was wiping his eyes, and portly Doctor Haverhill was adding to the general din of applause by pounding on the floor with his gold-headed cane. The chairman rose to announce the last speaker on the programme, but Phil did not wait for anything more. He had seen Mary pick up the coat which she had left hanging on the chair behind the palms, and leave the platform. At the same time Sandford Berry started up from his place at the reporters' table and hurried after her.

Immediately Phil slipped from his seat and dashed down the aisle along the side wall, to the door leading into one of the wings. Not familiar with the back exits, he stumbled into several wrong passages before he found some one to start him in the right direction. Despite his haste, when he reached the street, Mrs. Blythe's automobile was just whirling away from the curbstone, and Sandford Berry was coming back from putting Mary into it. He had the newspaper in his hand which she had brought from Diamond Row. It was for

that he had hurried after her, promising to use it to good advantage and return it to her in the morning. She had refused at first, remembering old Mrs. Donegan's caution not to let it out of her hands, and it was that brief parley which held her long enough for Phil to reach the street and catch a fleeting glimpse of her.

He looked around for a taxicab or a carriage, but there was none in sight. A policeman on the next corner directed him to a trolley car, and told him where to transfer in order to reach Dudley Blythe's residence. As he swung up on to the platform of the car he looked at his watch again. It was half-past four o'clock. It was past five when he reached the house. A tie-up of cars on the track ahead was accountable for the delay.

Mary, in the machine and by a more direct route, had reached home nearly half an hour before. She found a trained nurse in attendance on Mr. Blythe. He had regained consciousness and, though still unable to speak, was so much better that they were sure of his ultimate recovery. Mrs. Blythe came out into the hall to tell her the good news.

"There's no need to ask you how *you* got through," she exclaimed, slipping an arm around her in an impulsive embrace.

"I know you did splendidly, and I'll be in your room in a few minutes to hear all about it. Now, run along and lie down awhile. You look so white and tired — no wonder, after all you've been through to-day."

If Mary had been at the boarding-house she would have thrown herself down on the bed and gone without her supper. She felt so exhausted and collapsed. But under the circumstances she felt that the obligations of a guest required her to keep going. The evening meal was always somewhat of a formal affair here, but she decided not to dress for it as usual. Mr. Blythe's illness would change everything in that regard. She was so tired she would just bathe her face and brush her hair while she still had energy enough to move, and then would stretch out in the big lounging chair in the firelight, and be ready for Mrs. Blythe any time she might happen to come in. It took only a few moments to do all this, and just as she finished, Mrs. Blythe came in with a cup of hot tea.

"Drink it and don't say a word until you have finished," she ordered.

Mary obeyed the first part, sipping the tea slowly as she lay back luxuriously in the big chair, but she couldn't help commenting on the strange, strange

day that had brought so many unexpected things to pass.

"Isn't it a blessed good thing," she exclaimed, "that we can't know when we get up in the morning all that the day has in store for us? You'd have been nearly crazy if you'd known all day that Mr. Blythe was going to have that stroke of paralysis, and I'd simply have gone up in the air if I had dreamed that I had to take your place on the programme. Nothing could have happened that would have surprised me more."

But even while she spoke a still greater surprise was in store for her. Both had heard the doorbell ring a moment before, but neither had paid any attention to it. Now the maid came in with a message for Mary.

"A gentleman in the library to see you, Miss Ware. He wouldn't give his name. He just said to tell you that he was an old friend passing through town, and that he couldn't go till he had seen you."

"Who can it be?" exclaimed Mary, pulling herself slowly up from the sleepy hollow chair, much puzzled. "If it's an old friend, it must be some one from Lloydsboro Valley. Everybody else is too far away to drop in like that. But why didn't he send up his card, I wonder?"

"Probably because he wants to surprise you," answered Mrs. Blythe. "If it's any one you'd care to invite to dinner, feel perfectly free to do so."

With a word of thanks and a hasty peep into the mirror, Mary started down stairs, wondering at every step whom she would find. Time had been when she would have pictured an imaginary suitor waiting for her below, for it had been one of her pastimes when she was a child to manufacture such mythical personages by the score. What they were like depended on what she had just been reading. If fairy-tales, then it was a blond-haired prince who came to her on bended knee to kiss her hand and beg her to fly with him upon his coal-black steed to his castle. If she had been dipping into some forbidden novel like *Lady Agatha's Career,* then the fond suppliant was a haughty duke whom she spurned at first, but graciously accepted afterward. Through many a day-dream, slender lads and swarthy knights in armor, dauntless Sir Galahads and wicked St. Elmos had sued for her favor in turn, with long and fervent speeches. She did not know that there was any other way. And it had always been in moon-lighted gardens that these imaginary scenes took place, with nightingales singing in rose vines and jessamine arbors.

She had quit dreaming of such things since she came to Riverville. Romance had little place in the hard, sad world with which her work brought her in contact. So no such fancies passed through her mind now as she went down the stairs; nothing but a keen curiosity to know which of her old friends it was who waited below.

Dusk had fallen early that gray November evening, but the library was aglow with the cheerful light of an open fire. Some one stood before it, gazing down into the dancing flames, a tall, familiar figure, broad-shouldered and erect. There was no mistaking who it was waiting there in the gloaming. Only one person in all the world had that lordly turn of the head, that alert, masterful air, and Mary acknowledged to herself with a disquieting throb of the pulses that he was the one person in the world whom of all others she wished most to see.

"Oh, Phil!" she cried happily from the doorway.

He had not heard her coming down the stairs and along the hall, so softly was it carpeted, but at the call he turned and came to meet her, both hands out, his handsome face suddenly radiant, as if the sight of her brought unspeakable pleasure. Not a

word did he say as he reached out and took her hands in his and looked down into her upturned face. But his eyes spoke. Their very smile was a caress, and the strong, warm hands clasping hers closed over them as if they had just found something that belonged to them and were taking undisputed possession.

There was no need for him to tell her all that he had come to say. She felt it throbbing through the silence that was as solemn as a sacrament. Their eyes looked into each other's searchingly. Then, as if from the beginning of time they had been moving towards this meeting, he announced simply, "I've come for you, dear. I'm starting on a new trail now, and I can't go without you."

If that first hour of their betrothal had little need of words, there was call for much speech and many explanations before he bade her good night. Mary learned first, to her unbounded amazement, how near he had come to asking her to marry him more than two years before, when he parted from her in Bauer.

"But you were not more than half-way grown up then," he said. "I realized it when I saw you romping around with Norman. I couldn't say anything then because it didn't seem fair to you. But

I had to bind you in some way. That's why I made you promise what you did about letting me know if any other man ever crossed your trail. I wanted to claim you then and there and make sure of you, for I've always felt in some way or another we belonged to each other. I've felt that ever since I first knew you, Little Vicar."

There flashed across Mary's mind the remembrance of a conversation she had overheard on the porch at The Locusts one night, and of Phil's voice singing to Lloyd, to the accompaniment of a guitar:

> "Till the stars are old,
> And the sun grows cold,
> And the leaves of the Judgment
> Book unfold."

But if the faintest spark of jealousy glowed in Mary's heart, it was extinguished at once and forever by another recollection — a remark of Phil's as they once waited on the side-track together, going up to Bauer after the San Jacinto festival. It was just after she had confessed to the unconscious eavesdropping that made her a hearer of that song.

"Yes," he said, "that time will always be one of the sweetest and most sacred of my memories. One's earliest love always is, they say, like the first

white violet in the spring. But — *there is always a summer after every spring, you know.*"

Who cares for one little violet of a bygone spring when the prodigal wealth of a whole wonderful summertime is being poured out for one? So when Phil said again musingly, "It does seem strange, how we've always belonged to each other, doesn't it?" Mary looked up with a twinkling smile to say:

"How could it be otherwise with *Philip and Mary on a shilling?*" And then she showed him the old English shilling which she wore on her watch-fob, the charm which she had drawn from Eugenia's wedding cake. To Phil's unbounded amusement she told the story of dropping it into the contribution plate that Christmas service, and getting lost in the streets of New York in trying to rescue it from the bank where it had been taken for deposit.

CHAPTER VII

HER GREAT RENUNCIATION

Mary went back to her work next day, but not to the same old treadmill. It could never be that again. The thought that Phil was waiting for her, working to provide a home for her, glorified the most commonplace day, and came between her and her most disagreeable tasks. It was uppermost in her mind when she made her visits to the tenements, and often caused her to pause and ask herself why the gods had picked her out to make her the most blessed among mortals. What had *she* done that life should bestow so much more on her than it had on poor Dena and Elsie Whayne?

Somehow the sharp contrast between her lot and theirs hurt her more each time that it was forced upon her notice. It began to make her feel personally responsible, if not for the difference between them, at least for making that difference less. Why she owed it to them to do anything to make their lives more livable, she could not tell, but the obli-

gation to do so weighed upon her more heavily every day.

Maybe if her endeavors had not been so effectual she might not have felt the obligation so keenly, but she could not fail to see the difference that her visits made to the families in the Row. Sometimes she counted over the things she accomplished, as one might count the beads of a rosary, not from any sense of pride in what she had done, but as a sort of self-justification; asking herself, since she had done that much, could more be reasonably expected.

It was through her efforts that Dena was sent to a hospital and some one provided to take care of the invalid father and demented mother. It was because she had interested charitable people in their behalf that Elsie Whayne found a home in the country once more, and old Mrs. Donegan's eyes had such skilful treatment from a specialist that she was able to use them again. There were a dozen instances like that, but best of all, she realized that she was responsible in a direct way for the miraculous change that took place in Diamond Row itself.

The morning that Phil went away she was too much occupied to care for such trivial matters as the

daily papers. She did not even glance at the Riverville *Herald* to see if it mentioned the fact that she had taken Mrs. Blythe's place on the programme. It was not until late that afternoon that she found there was quite a glowing tribute to her ability as a speaker. Sandford Berry had written it. He had also done more. In a way they have in newspaper offices he had taken the paper that Mary loaned him, traced the article denouncing Burke Stoner to its source, and found that the man who had written it was now a prominent lawyer in Riverville. He had been employed on the editorial staff of the *Herald* for a short time ten years before. Armed with permission to use his name if necessary, in verifying the article, Sandford Berry had electrified the town the morning after Mary's talk, by printing her description of Diamond Row, and her burning appeal to the people of Riverville to rise up and wipe out the disgrace in their midst. She had not mentioned Burke Stoner's name, nor was her name mentioned in connection with this article. It was for political reasons solely that the *Herald* made capital of it, stringing sensational headlines across the front page in startling black letters: "One of to-morrow's candidates responsible for death of one tenant and maybe two. Shame-

ful condition of Tenth and Myrtle Street tenements, from which millionaire owner collects many thousands a year rental."

There was a picture of Burke Stoner, surrounded by a circle of condemning snapshots of the basement room which had filled Mary with such horror on her first visit, the stairway labelled "Death-trap of ten years' standing," and a portrait of little Terence Reilly, reproduced from the first paper.

Next morning Sandford Berry called her over the telephone to say gleefully, "Well, it did the work! Coming as it did the last minute before election it simply wiped Stoner off the map. He was defeated overwhelmingly, and, between you and me and the gate-post, it was your speech that did it. I took the liberty of appropriating it without giving you any credit, for I knew that you wouldn't want to be mixed up in a mess like that. Didn't I tell you that you'd be the biggest beacon fire in the lot when you once got a-going? Well, you've started a blaze now that'll rage a bit. Tell Mrs. Blythe that she'll have no trouble now in getting the city ordinance she wanted, providing building inspectors. This Board of Aldermen is hot for it, now that Stoner is out of the way, and losing this election is going to cripple his influence

through all this part of the state. It'll help the bill you want to put through the next session more than you realize. You didn't have any idea how far your little candle was throwing its beams when you made that speech, did you, Miss Mary? Well, it's indeed a good deed you did for this naughty world."

"That's just Orphant Annie's extravagant way of putting things," thought Mary, as she hung up the receiver. "My part in it wouldn't have amounted to a row of pins if he hadn't written it up so vividly with all those scare headlines. But, still, I *did* start it all," she acknowledged to herself, "and it's something to have done that."

For a moment she was elated by the sense of power that thrilled her. But the thought that followed had a queer chilling effect. If she could start such forces in motion for the betterment of the human beings around her, had she any right to turn her back on this work which she knew she was called to, just as definitely as Joan of Arc was called to *her* mission?

Phil's coming had made her forget for a little space what she had been so very sure of for many months, that she had been set apart for some high destiny, too great to allow her own personal considerations to interfere. Now, at his call, she was

about to forsake her first tryst and turn to him. In just a little while she would leave it all and give herself wholly to him. Was it right? Was it right?

That question troubled her oftener as the days went by. Not when his letters came and his strong personality seemed to fold protectingly about her while she read, shutting out the doubts which troubled her. Not when she sat with his picture before her, tracing its outlines over and over with adoring eyes. Not when she gave herself up to dreams of the little home he wrote about frequently. The little home she would know so well how to make into a real hearts' haven. She blessed the old days of hard times and hard work now, for the valuable lessons they had taught her.

But "is it right? Is it right to fail in the keeping of my first tryst for this one of purely selfish pleasure?" she asked herself when she saw the changes that were being wrought in Diamond Row. Before the winter went by it had been transformed. It was not the sting of defeat which drove Burke Stoner to do it, nor the sting of public opinion aroused against him, but the pride of his own daughter, a girl of Mary's age, when she learned the facts in the case.

She chanced to be in the audience the day when Mary made her appeal, and unaware that it was her father's property that was being described, was one of the most thoroughly aroused listeners in the whole audience. But when she saw her father's picture in the paper next day, set in the midst of others, proclaiming him a disgrace to good citizenship, her mortification at being thus publicly shamed was something pitiful to see. Hitherto it had been her pride to see his name heading popular subscription lists, and to hear him spoken of as the friend of the poor, on account of liberal donations.

Nobody knew what kind of a scene took place when she read the condemning headlines, but it was reported that she locked herself in her room and refused to see her father for several days. She was his only child and his idol, and she had to be pacified at any cost. So she had her way as usual, this time to the transforming of the whole of Diamond Row, and the comfort of its inmates.

It began with drains and city water-works to supplant the infected cistern. It moved on to paint and plaster and new floors, to the putting in of a skylight in two dark rooms, and the cutting of windows in the third. And, more than that, it led to the opening of both skylight and windows into the

sympathies of Burke Stoner's petted daughter, and led her out of her round of self-centred thoughts to unselfish interest in her unfortunate neighbors. It is a question which of the two gained the greatest inrush of sunshine by those openings.

Mary, watching all this, felt alternately exultant that she had been the means of starting these blessed changes, and depressed by the thought that she would be doing wrong if she turned her back on the opportunity of continuing such work. Thanksgiving went by and the first of December. As the shops began to put on holiday dress Mary began to be more depressed than ever. The burden of her poor people pressed upon her more sorely each day that she listened to their stories of the hard winter and their struggle to make both ends meet. But more depressing still were the times when old Mrs. Donegan begged her to come often, and called down the blessing of all the saints in the calendar upon her head, and told her tearfully that it would be a sorry day for the Row that took her away from it.

"It's God's own blessing you've been to the whole tenement!" she proclaimed volubly on every occasion, and, remembering the changes that had been brought about directly and indirectly by her

efforts, Mary knew that it was so, and felt all the more strongly that she would be doing wrong to abandon the work.

Mr. Blythe was able to be out again by Christmas time. The two boys came home for the holidays, and for two weeks Mary helped with the entertaining that went on in the big house. There was no question now of her going back to the boarding-house at Mrs. Crum's. Mrs. Blythe said that having once experienced the comfort of having a daughter in the house, she could not dispense with her. She could go off to the capital now with a free conscience, leaving Mary in charge of the establishment. So, in January she went, and for several weeks waited for the bill to come up before the Legislature; busy weeks in which she was occupied all day long in making new friends for her cause.

Then she wrote home cheerfully that the bill had come up. There had been much opposition, and it had been cut down and amended till it would fit only the larger cities of the state. They had gained only a part of what they had asked for, but that was something, and they would go on awakening public sentiment until the next session, and bring it up again. The fight would have to be made all

over again, but they would make it valiantly, hoping for absolute victory next time. She would be home in a few days.

Up till this time Mary had not realized how anxiously she was looking forward to the passage of the bill. Upon its fate depended her own, for as one draws straws to decide a matter, she had made up her mind to let its outcome settle the question which had troubled her so long. If it went through successfully, and the State thus proved that it was fully awake to its duty, then she would feel that her obligation was ended. That was the specific work she had pledged herself to do. But if it failed — well, it would break her heart, but she'd have to keep the tryst, no matter what it cost her.

Her intense desire for its success gradually led her to feel that it was assured, and the news of only a partial victory left her as undecided as before. To escape the mood of depression which seized her the snowy Sunday night before Mrs. Blythe's return, she put on her wraps and slipped out to a little church in the next block, hoping to find some word to quiet her unrest, either in song, service or sermon. She sat listening almost feverishly till the minister announced his text: "*No man, having put*

his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."

It was a sermon extolling sacrifice. The minister, a young man with a thin, earnest face and deep-set eyes that burned like two dark fires, seemed to know no call of the flesh. It was all of the spirit. One after another he cited the examples of the Father Damiens, the Florence Nightingales of the world, till the whole noble army of martyrs, the goodly company of the Apostles were marshalled before Mary's accusing conscience, and she felt herself condemned as unfit to stand with them, wholly unfit for the kingdom. The closing hymn was as accusing as the sermon:

"The Son of God goes forth to war. Who follows in His train?

. . . . . .

Who best can drink his cup of woe, triumphant over pain,
Who patient bears his cross below, he follows in His train."

She went away with those lines repeating themselves in her ears. It was still early when she went home, but Mr. Blythe had retired, so telling the maid to close the house for the night, she went up to her own room, where the fire burned cheerfully in the grate. She drew up a little table before it and brought out her writing material. She had

made up her mind to make the supreme sacrifice of her life, even if it killed her.

"Keep tryst or die!" she sobbed, as she took up her pen. "Oh, Phil! How can I write it, that I must give you up?"

It took a long time to tell him. She wanted to make it perfectly clear to him that it was breaking her heart to do it. She was afraid he wouldn't understand how she felt about not being fit for the kingdom, and it was hard to put down in black and white such a deeply personal, such a spiritual thing as that experience of hearing the voices and answering the call. But in no other way could she explain. Twice she broke down utterly, and with her head on her arms on the little table, cried and sobbed with long shuddering gasps that shook her convulsively. Once she threw the half-finished letter into the fire, saying fiercely in a low tone, "I *can't!* Oh, I *can't!* It would be giving up more than Father Damien did. It's more than I can bear!"

But she remembered again those awful words, "No man, putting his hand to the plough"— *This* was looking back. She took another sheet of paper and patiently rewrote all that was on the sheets she had just burned. It was nearly morning when she

finally sealed the envelope and crept into bed exhausted by the ordeal. There was no sense of "rising triumphant over pain" to reward her for her sacrifice, but her stern little Puritan conscience found a dreary sort of comfort in the thought that she had followed duty, and that nothing else mattered.

"One doesn't *have* to be happy," she told herself, over and over.

When she awoke next morning and remembered what she had done, the bottom seemed to drop out of the whole universe, and she felt a hundred years old as she moved languidly about the room at her dressing.

"But I can't go on this way," she exclaimed, catching a glimpse of her wan-eyed reflection in the mirror. "Such a half-hearted sort of giving won't do any good. I shall have to do as the nuns do when they shut their convent gate on the world, shut it entirely and forever. I shall have to put away everything that reminds me of Phil."

She glanced around the room. How many reminders there were, for she had always treasured everything he had ever sent her; books, pictures, little curios picked up on his travels. Even an odd stone he had found on the desert and brought into

the Wigwam one day, she used now as a paper-weight. An Indian basket he had bought from an old squaw at Hole-in-the-rock held her sewing materials. Just under her hand on the table lay the little book he had given her to read on the train when she was starting home after Jack's accident, "The Jester's Sword." As she fingered it caressingly, it seemed to open of its own accord to the fly-leaf, where was printed the line from Stevenson: "To renounce when that shall be necessary and not be embittered." And then on the opposite page — "Because he was born in Mars' month the bloodstone became his signet, sure token that undaunted courage would be the jewel of his soul."

She had thought those lines were wonderfully helpful when she offered them to Jack as an inspiration to renew *his* courage, but what a hollow mockery they seemed now that the time had come to apply them to her own case. Still, the thought of the brave Jester persisted, and was with her when she went down to breakfast, and later when she went to the station to meet Mrs. Blythe. She, too, would wear her sword of conquest so hidden, and unbeknown, even to those who walked closest to her side.

Almost feverishly she threw herself into the du-

ties of the next few days, glad that an accumulation of letters on Mrs. Blythe's desk kept her busy at the typewriter all morning, and that some investigating for the Associated Charities kept her tramping about the streets the rest of the time, until nightfall. She thought that she was hiding her secret so successfully that no one imagined she had one. She talked more than usual at the table, she laughed at the slightest excuse, she joined spiritedly in the repartee at dinner, a time when they nearly always had guests. But keen-eyed Mrs. Blythe saw several things in the course of the week. She noticed her lack of appetite, the long spells of abstraction that came sometimes after her merriest outbursts; the deep shadows under her eyes of a morning, as if she had passed many sleepless hours.

Then going into her room one day it occurred to her that Phil's pictures were missing. There had been several, so prominently placed on mantel, dressing-table and desk that one saw them the first thing on entering. Then she noticed that the solitaire was gone from Mary's finger, and was tempted to ask the reason, but resisted the impulse, thinking that it was probably because of some trivial misunderstanding which would right itself in time.

One afternoon, passing through the lower end of

the hall, she saw Mary sitting at the typewriter in the alcove that had been curtained off for an office. She was about to call to her to stop and get ready for a tramp before dark, when the postman's whistle sounded across the street. He was making his four o'clock rounds. It was a rare occurrence for him to pass the house at this time of day without leaving something. All winter it had been the hour at which Phil's daily letter was most likely to arrive. Mrs. Blythe recalled the big, dashing hand in which they were always addressed, and Mary's radiant face when they arrived.

Now, at the sounding of the whistle, the clicking of keys stopped and Mary leaned forward to look out of the window, and watch the progress of the postman down the avenue. He did not cross over. As the cheerful whistle sounded again, further down the street, she suddenly leaned her arms on the typewriter in front of her and dropped her head upon them in such an attitude of utter hopelessness that Mrs. Blythe hesitated no longer.

"What's the matter, dear?" she asked kindly, putting her arms around her, and Mary, surprised into confession, sobbed out the story of her renunciation on her sympathetic shoulder.

If there was one person in the world whom Mary

thought would understand, who would heartily approve of what she had done, and who would comfort her with due appreciation and praise, that person would be Mrs. Blythe. But, to her astonishment, although the arm that encircled her closed around her with an affectionate embrace, the exclamation that accompanied it was only, "Oh, you dear little, blessed little *goose!*"

It was a shock, and yet there was some note in it that gave Mary a glad, swift sense of relief and comfort. She straightened up and wiped her eyes. Mrs. Blythe hurried to say:

"Don't think for a moment that I don't appreciate to the very fullest your motive in making such a sacrifice. I think it is very fine and noble of you, but — my dear little girl, I don't believe it is wholly necessary. You see, it's this way. The work we are trying to do can't be accomplished by any one person. If it could you would be gloriously justified in giving your whole life up to it. But it must be the work of many. One little torch can't possibly lighten every town in the country. Even that greatest of beacons, the statue of Liberty, lightens only one harbor. All we can hope to do is to kindle the unlit torches next to us, and keep the circle of light widening in every direction till the farthest bound-

ary of the farthest state is aglow. And you can do that wherever you go, Mary. Very few states have their homes safeguarded by the law we are trying to get for this one. And every town and village in the United States has the *beginning* of a city slums in some of its corners.

" Perhaps the very greatest thing you can do for the cause is to show other girls that they don't have to be like nuns in order to help. They don't have to take any sort of vow or veil that shuts them away from a normal, usual life. It is something in which social influence counts for a very great deal. Because I have a home of my own, and a recognized social position, and am a happy wife and mother, people listen to me far more readily when I go to them with a plea for less fortunate homes and wives and mothers. Mrs. Philip Tremont will be able to accomplish even more than little Mary Ware. I cannot see where loyalty to Phil and loyalty to your conception of what you owe humanity conflict in the slightest. Marriage may take away the leisure that you have now. Few women have the time to give to a public cause what I am giving. It is only of late years that I have had it myself. But a torch is a torch, no matter where you put it, and sometimes the lights streaming from cheerful home

windows make better guides for the benighted traveller than the street lamp, whose sole purpose is to give itself to the public."

"I hadn't thought about it that way," said Mary slowly, looking out of the window in order to keep her face averted. "Maybe you're right, but it's too late for me to take your point of view, much as I'd like to. I wrote to Phil a week ago, and sent back his ring, and I made it so clear that it was a matter of conscience with me, that I'm very sure that I convinced him that I was doing the right thing. At any rate, there has been plenty of time for a reply, and I haven't had a word. 'Silence gives consent,' you know."

She spoke drearily and kept on looking out of the window so long that Mrs. Blythe was sure that her eyes were full of tears which she wanted to hide. So she rose briskly, saying, as if the matter were ended:

"Well, at any rate, come on and let's have our walk. We can tramp out to the Turnpike Inn and come back by trolley before dark if we start immediately."

All the way out and back Mrs. Blythe could see what an effort Mary was making to appear interested in the conversation, but she knew by intuition

that her thoughts were not on the people and places they passed. Each way she turned she was seeing, not the bare February landscape, but the handsome, laughing face she was trying so hard to put out of her memory. It was doubly hard now that Mrs. Blythe had pronounced her renunciation of it unnecessary. The more Mary thought about it, the more reasonable Mrs. Blythe's viewpoint seemed. It was true that Dudley Blythe's position in the professsional world gave his wife a certain prestige with many people, and her words a weight they would not have had otherwise, despite her own personal charm and ability. And his hearty endorsement and coöperation was her strongest support.

"Maybe Mrs. Blythe was right," thought Mary. Maybe giving herself to Phil wouldn't be looking back from the "plough" to which she had consecrated herself. Maybe it would only be giving it a strong, guiding hand. She certainly needed it herself, judging from the mess she had made of her life and Phil's.

Oddly enough, it was not until that moment that she thought of him as being particularly affected by her decision. Probably it was because she had always taken such an humble attitude in

her mind towards the Best Man that she had not realized it might be as hard for him to be "renounced" as for her to make the sacrifice.

On their return Mrs. Blythe saw her quick glance at the silver tray on the hall table. Any letters arriving while they were out were always placed there. It was impossible that there should be any now, for the postman had made his last rounds before they started out. Nevertheless, she glanced hopefully towards it, and was turning away in disappointment when the maid, who had heard their latchkey in the door, came into the hall.

"There's a caller in the library for Miss Ware," she announced. "Been waiting nearly an hour."

"It's probably Electa Dunn," said Mary listlessly, to whom the word "waiting" brought up the figure of an unfortunate little seamstress who had spent a large part of her life in that attitude.

"I left word that I had some sewing for her to do and would send the material to-morrow. She must be more eager than ever for work, else she wouldn't come a day ahead of time and wait till dark to get it."

The library door stood open and the firelight shone out cheerfully across the hall, now almost dark with the shadows of the February twilight.

Just that way it had shone out to meet her three months before, when she came down and found Phil there. That room had seemed sacred to her ever since. She wished the maid had not sent Electa in there to wait for her. It hurt so to have to go into it and recall all that had happened since that meeting. For an instant her eyes closed and her lips pressed together as if an actual physical pain had gripped her. Then she forced herself to go on. At the doorway she paused again and passed the back of her hand across her eyes, sure that she was dreaming.

It was all as it had been that never-to-be-forgotten night. Some one stood before the fire gazing down into the dancing flames. It was not the patient little seamstress, however. The tall, masterful man that stood there had never waited patiently for anything in his life. Now, at the sound of her entrance, he turned and came impetuously towards her, his face alight, his hands outstretched.

Mrs. Blythe, half-way up the stairs, heard Mary's surprised cry, "Oh, Phil!" and nodded sagely to herself. "He's come instead of writing, just as I thought he would. Wise man!"

CHAPTER VIII

HOW IT ALL ENDED

When Mary's letter with the ring reached Phil, he was making preparations to leave New York that very day. Mr. Sherman had offered him a partnership in one of his enterprises, with headquarters in Louisville. It was a very flattering offer, still Phil hesitated. Personally, he preferred the position in the far West, which his former chief had been urging him all winter to accept. His previous training fitted him for one as well as the other, but he had always loved the West, always felt its lure.

It was when he considered Mary, that Mr. Sherman's offer appealed to him most. When he thought of the radiant delight with which she would receive the news that they could cross over and take possession of her long-desired land, he was almost persuaded to choose Kentucky, for that one reason alone. He was fully persuaded the morning her letter arrived, and had just telegraphed Mr. Sher-

man that he was starting for Louisville to arrange matters at once.

It was well for both Phil and Mary that he had known her so long and understood so thoroughly the ins and outs of her honest little heart. This was not the first time that he had known her to make some renunciation for conscience' sake, and although the letter, in his own forcible parlance, "gave him a jolt" for an hour or so, after several readings he folded it up with a smile and slipped it into the package with the others marked "From the Little Vicar."

He hadn't the faintest intention of being "renounced." Moreover, he was positive that he had only to see her and urge a few good arguments in his favor, which would convince her that he would never be in the way of what she considered her duty.

But a very tender regard lay under his smile of amusement, for the attitude she had taken, and a feeling of reverence possessed him as he saw her in the new light which this revelation of her spiritual life gave him. "Nobody is good enough for little Mary Ware," he had said once, when she was a romping child. He was thinking of her unselfishness, her sturdy sincerity, her undaunted courage. Now he repeated it, thinking of her as this letter

revealed her, a white-souled vestal maiden who took the stars as a symbol of her duty, and who would not swerve a hair's-breadth from the orbit which she thought was heaven appointed.

Knowing that he could reach her almost as quickly as a letter, and confident that a personal interview would be a thousandfold more effective, Phil did not write. But he took the first train to Louisville, and after a few days with Mr. Sherman left for Riverville, armed with an argument and a promise which he was sure would carry weight in his behalf. The argument was that he needed her. He was about to take charge of an important business entrusted to him, and he could not do it half so well without the inspiration of the little home she had agreed to help him make. The promise was that marrying him should not interfere with what she considered her tryst. She should have his hearty help and coöperation in trying to do for any state which they might move to, what Mrs. Blythe was doing for hers.

All this and much more he said in the first impetuous words of meeting, and almost before Mary had recovered from the overwhelming surprise of seeing him, the ring was back on her finger and she was listening to the plans which he rapidly out-

lined to her. He wasn't going to give her a chance to change her mind again, he insisted. There was no reason why they should not be married right there in the library the following day, as soon as he could make the necessary arrangements.

"Oh, but there is a reason," gasped Mary, aghast at the sudden demand. Then she hesitated, loath to tell what it was. For though it was a weighty one with her, she knew that he would smile at it as childish. But, after all, it was easier to confess to Phil than any one else. He seemed to understand perfectly what she meant, even when the words halted and failed to express her innermost feelings.

So, presently, she found herself explaining to him that it had always been one of her beliefs from the time of her earliest knowledge of such things, that one couldn't properly be a bride without a certain ceremony of preparation. The filling of a dower chest was one part of it, and the setting of infinite stitches, each as perfect as a tiny pearl, in much "fair and broidered raiment" was another. The princesses in the fairy tales did their fine needlework to the accompaniment of songs upon a lute; so one set stitches in one's wedding garments, to the romance of fancies — and so —

She did not finish coherently, but Phil laughed and said teasingly that he ought to have known that any one, who, as a child, wept to wear her rose-bud sash out walking on the desert, where there were only owls and jack-rabbits to see it, would insist on veils and trails and things at a time like this. He wouldn't wait for the filling of a dower chest. She could do that afterward; but he was finally induced to wait for the other things, when Mrs. Blythe was brought into the discussion and pronounced them actually necessary.

He went back to Louisville without telling Mary of his arrangement with Mr. Sherman which had changed all his plans. The home he had written so much about would be ready for her, but it would not be in the far West, as she expected. He could hardly wait for the day to come when he could witness her delight over the tremendous surprise which he had in store for her.

It was not many weeks before he had the pleasure of telling her, but it was over two months before she made a record of it in her diary. Then she wrote:

"There is room for just one more chapter in my Good Times book, and when that is finished it is to be laid away in the chest with my wedding

gown and bridal roses. Maybe, a hundred years from now, some young girl rummaging through the attic may find my beautiful dress all yellowed with time, and the rose leaves dried and scentless. But I am sure my happiness will call to her from these pages like a living voice as young as hers.

"And when she sees how this record is blistered with tears in places, and reads how Disappointment and Duty and even Death rose up to 'close all the roads of all the world' to me, then she'll take 'heart of grace' if she is in any desert of waiting herself. For she'll see how true it is that Love's road is always open, and that if we only keep inflexible it will finally lead to the land of our desire. For here I am at last in Lloydsboro Valley.

"It has been more than two months since Phil and I were married at Saint Mark's Cathedral in Riverville, but I have been too busy to write the chronicles of that important affair. No one was there but Mr. and Mrs. Dudley Blythe. Dear old Bishop Chartley came down for the ceremony. His warm friendship with Mrs. Blythe made that arrangement possible. It was late in the afternoon, and the great stained-glass windows made it seem like twilight, and down the long dim aisles the altar candles gleamed like stars.

"I had thought at first that the vast place would seem empty and lonesome, and that it would be queer not to have the pews filled with friendly faces at a time like that. But when I went down the aisle I wasn't conscious of empty pews. The glorious organ music filled it, clear to the vaulted ceiling. And although Phil had teased me about not wanting to wear an ordinary travelling dress and hat, he had to acknowledge afterward that he was glad I chose to come to him all in white and in a filmy tulle veil. And he said some dear things about the way I looked, that were as sweet to me as the rose leaves I have scattered among the folds of my wedding gown's white loveliness. I have not put what he said into these pages for the girl to find a century from now. For fashions change so curiously that maybe she would smile and say how very queer my old-time garments are, and wonder how any man could have made a pretty speech about them.

"Phil proved he had some sentiment about such things himself, for soon after he bought me a real 'Ginevra' chest, all beautifully carved, with my name engraved on the brass plate on the lid: '*Mary Ware Tremont.*'

"Not until we were aboard the train, and he

showed me our tickets marked Loydsboro Valley, did I know that we were bound for Kentucky, instead of the far West, and not until we were almost there did he spring his grand surprise, although he was nearly choking with impatience to tell. Of course I hadn't expected that we would set up much of an establishment. I supposed that wherever we went we would rent a modest little cottage, probably in the suburbs. I knew that Phil couldn't afford much. He never began to save anything at all until two years ago. He confessed when he first came back from Mexico that it was a lecture of mine about providing a financial umbrella for a possible rainy day which started him to doing it, and that as expenses were light in the construction camp, and his pay very large, he had put by enough to take us through almost anything, short of a cloudburst. But that was an emergency fund, of course, and not to be invested in houses and lands.

"He never told me that the tangle about his Great-aunt Patricia's holdings in England, whatever that may be, had been straightened out at last, and that his share, paid to him recently, was over five thousand pounds.

"That was the first part of the surprise. The second was that he had *bought* (mark that word,

whoever you are, oh, little maiden of the far-off future, if you ever come across this record of happiness) — he had bought a home in Lloydsboro Valley. He had the deed in his pocket, and he showed how it was made out to *me!*

"Well, when the time comes for me 'to read my title clear to mansions in the skies,' I *may* be happier than I was that moment, but I doubt it. I don't see how it could be possible. And when I got it through my bewildered brain that it was *Green Acres* that was meant by all the queer measurements and descriptions in the deed, I lost my head altogether, and Phil had the satisfaction of seeing that his surprise was absolute, supreme and overpowering. It seemed too good to be true.

"Green Acres is just across the road from Oaklea. The grounds don't make you think of a big, stately park as Oaklea does. It is more countrified. But it is the dearest, most homelike, inviting old place that one can imagine. I had been there several times with Lloyd and Mrs. Sherman, and remembered it as a real picture-book sort of house, with its low gables and quaint casement windows. I remembered that it had a garden gay as Grandmother Ware's, with its holly-hocks and prince's feathers, its marigolds and yellow roses; and that

it had mint and sage and all sorts of spicy, savory things in some of its borders. But I didn't know half of its charms. Now, after two months, I am just beginning to discover the extent of them.

"When a family has owned a place for three generations, as the Wyckliffes did Green Acres, and have spent their time making it livable and lovable, the result leaves little more to be wished for. The hillside that slopes down from the back of the house has a small orchard on part of it and a smaller vineyard on the other, but both quite ample for our needs. Down at the bottom a little brook trickles along from a cold spring, and watercress and forget-me-nots grow along its edges. The apple trees are in bloom now. This morning I spent a whole hour up in the gnarly crotch of one of them, doing nothing but enjoying to the fullest the sweetness of their white and pink glory.

"When we came only the early wildflowers were out, but all the knoll between the gate and the house looked as if there had been a snowfall of anemones and spring beauties. It isn't possible to put into black and white the joy of that first home-coming. We walked up from the station, and when we went through the great gate and heard it click behind us, shutting us in on our own grounds, we turned and

looked at each other and laughed like delighted children. It was as if we had reached that land that we used to sing about, where

> "'Sweet fields beyond the swelling flood
> Stand dressed in living green.'

No wonder they named the place Green Acres!

"We left the wide driveway that winds around the hill to the house, and took the little path that leads straight up to it under the trees. The foot-path to peace, Phil calls it.

"There was smoke coming out of the kitchen chimney, for Lloyd and Mrs. Sherman had been in the secret and had helped Phil as industriously as the two genii of the Bottle to get everything ready. He had bought some of the furniture with the house, some they had helped him choose and some they waited for me to select myself. But there was enough to make the place livable right away, and there wasn't a room in the house that didn't look comfortable and inviting.

"And there was May Lily installed in the kitchen as temporary cook, and perfectly willing to stay if I wanted her. As if there could be any question as to that! If there was anything needed to make it seem more homelike than it already was, I found

"'IT WAS AS IF WE HAD REACHED THAT LAND THAT WE USED TO SING ABOUT.'"

it when we started out to explore the back premises. A fussy old hen, with her feathers all fluffed out importantly, was clucking and scratching for a brood of downy yellow chickens, just out of the shell. Old Mom Beck had sent them over as a wedding present, May Lily said.

"When we had been all through the orchard and down to the spring, and had discovered the rows of currant and gooseberry bushes at the end of the garden, Phil said in a careless off-hand way that we might as well take a look through the barn. By this time I had exhausted my whole stock of exclamations, so I hadn't another word left when he led me up to a stall, where stood one of the prettiest bay saddle horses I ever saw in my whole life. That was Father Tremont's present to me.

"'Daddy didn't know what would please you most,' Phil said, 'but I remembered the pleasure you used to take in old Washington out at the Wigwam, and Lloyd insisted that you would like a riding horse better than anything else. She rides every day herself, and was sure you would enjoy joining her on her gallops across country.'

"Well, by that time, being speechless, all I could

do was to put my arms around the beautiful creature's satiny neck and cry a bit into her glossy mane. The sheer happiness of having so many of my cherished dreams come true all at once was too much for me. Her name was Silver-wings, but from that moment I called her Joy.

"All afternoon I kept discovering things. When we sat down to dinner that night, our first meal together (Lloyd had told May Lily exactly what to do), a lot of the silver was marked Tremont, for the doctor had divided all of Aunt Patricia's silver that came down from her grandfather's family equally among Elsie and Stuart and Phil. But there were some beautiful pieces from Lloyd and the old Colonel, and Mr. and Mrs. Sherman. Stuart and Eugenia had sent quantities of fine table linen.

"The last surprise of the day was the housewarming. Everybody had stayed away till then, to let us have time to 'spy out the land and possess it.' Lloyd and Rob were the first to come over, then Gay and Alex Shelby. They have just gone to housekeeping in the Lindsey cabin. Every old friend in the Valley came before the evening was over, and gave us a royal welcome, as warm and heartening as the blaze which we started in the big

fireplace. When the Colonel went away he quoted from the Hanging of the Crane,

> "'Oh, fortunate, oh, happy day
> When a new household has its birth
> Amid the myriad homes of earth.'

"He said that Green Acres had always been the synonym for whole-souled hospitality, but that we had even surpassed its best traditions.

"There isn't room for much more in this little book; only a few pages are left, so I can't crowd into it all the good times of the last two months, but I must make mention of the delightful rides I have had with Lloyd, and the times when she and Gay and I have spent the day together in good old Valley fashion. Just to be this near my Princess Winsome and to see her daily is a constant joy. She is lovelier and more winsome than she ever was before.

"I must put on record that I have proved what Mrs. Blythe said to be true about the light from happy home windows being the best guide for benighted travellers, and that social influence counts so greatly in the work we are trying to do. Already I am beginning to see that as Mistress of Green Acres I shall be able to accomplish far more

than little Mary Ware ever did. Of course, that might not be possible if Phil were not in hearty sympathy with what I want to do. But he is thoroughly interested himself.

"The other night at the Moores I overheard him discussing Housing Reform with Judge Abbott of Lexington, as warmly as Mrs. Blythe could have done. Finally the whole dinner party took it up, and Mrs. Abbott said that her club had been interested in the subject for some time, and all they need is for some one to take the initiative. The Abbotts were staying several days with Lloyd and Rob, so next night I had them over here. After dinner I took them up into my 'Place of the Tryst.' Of course, I don't call it that to anybody but Phil, and he has dubbed it the Chamber of Horrors.

"It's just a big empty room up in one of the gables. There is nothing in it but a desk and a table and some chairs and the typewriter that I bought with the check which Jack sent me. But around the walls are copies of the photographs we used as posters in Riverville to arouse the public, and had hanging in the corridors of the State House all during the session of the Legislature. They are the very worst tenement views we could get,

like that basement in Diamond Row, and some of the windowless rooms taken by flashlight.

" Judge Abbott said he knew that there are places every bit as bad in Lexington and Frankfort and Covington, and Mr. Sherman and Alex Shelby said there were scores even worse in Louisville. Miss Allison told some experiences a friend of hers had in exploring alleys in some of the smaller towns, and presently the whole little company, representing several different parts of the state, were all ablaze from that one touch of Mrs. Blythe's torch.

" When I first fitted up the room, Phil said that it didn't seem right that a Chamber of Horrors should have a place in such a perfect home. But I told him that we needed it to keep us from ' joining ourselves to idols,' as Ephraim did. That is the danger that always menaces people when they get over into their Promised Land. We might be tempted to think so much of our dear possessions that we'd make idols of them sure enough, and forget all about the work we had pledged ourselves to do. No one has a right to settle down to the full possession and full enjoyment of any Canaan, until he has put to flight every Hittite and Gittite that preys upon its internal peace.

" They all seemed surprised to see my typewriter,

but I told them how I had used Mrs. Blythe's, and that this one is dedicated to the same cause. That I expected to write hundreds of letters just as soon as I found out who were the most influential people to address. Right then and there the movement started. Every man there promised me a list of his personal acquaintances who had big influence, and said he'd gladly put his signature to any letter or petition that would help get what we wanted. Lloyd and Miss Allison are both members of the Women's Club in Louisville, and they asked me to join, and are as enthusiastic as heart could wish. Judge Abbott took a copy of Mrs. Blythe's bill to look it over and see how it could be amended to put before the Kentucky Legislature, so already I feel that something has been accomplished. It is something just to get a start.

" Once, long ago, the old Colonel remarked that I had it in my power to become an honor to my sex and one of the most interesting women of my generation. My family used to quote it to me to tease me, on all occasions, but for years it was one of my highest ambitions to become what he had prophesied. It is something else that I crave now.

" I write it here on the last page and lay it away under the white tulle and the rose leaves, for some

one to bring to light long years from now. It will be the crowning happiness of my happy life, if she who reads may chance to have heard that my wish found fulfilment. For then she can add 'She *was* a blessing to her generation and a torch that helped to light the way for all who came after her.'"

THE END.

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